
Department of
Business and Management

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## Abstract

One of the key tenets of the present Government's education policy for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) has been that of inclusion, i.e. that wherever possible and appropriate, pupils with SEN should attend local mainstream schools with appropriate support.

Another important facet of Central Government policy over the last decade has been the increased emphasis on accountability in the public sector. One of the consequences of this trend has been the emergence of stakeholder theory as an important factor in determining the success of public sector organisations in meeting their objectives.

This dissertation has reviewed the past and present literature relating both to stakeholder theory and to the debate around inclusion from the standpoint of three principal stakeholder groups: schools, children and young people, and parents and carers. The purpose of this was to give a context to Liverpool's position vis a vis its stakeholders and to evaluate the likelihood of the success of Liverpool's Inclusion strategy for pupils with SEN.

The research examined the views of Liverpool's key stakeholders towards inclusion in general and to Liverpool's strategy in particular using a multi-method approach through the use of questionnaires, focus groups and case study.

Results obtained from the data analysis indicate a wide range of views and standpoints on the part of stakeholders and reveal some positive aspects to Liverpool's Inclusion strategy. They also point to a number of significant challenges which form the basis of some recommendations for the local authority to consider in order to ensure the success of its future strategy.

## Declaration

This work is original and has not been submitted previously for any academic purpose.  All secondary sources are acknowledged.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background to the Research

During the last twenty years, the UK has witnessed a period of significant change in the public sector which grew out of the belief of the last Conservative Government that the public sector was grossly inefficient and insufficiently accountable for its activities. The reforms have been characterised by the adoption of private sector management concepts and processes and the application of explicit standards and performance measures.

One of the consequences of the move to increased accountability in the public sector has been the emergence of the whole area of stakeholder involvement. Glynn and Murphy (1996) commented that seeking the views of customers/consumers was rarely carried out adequately in the public sector and certainly not to the extent that major successful private businesses carried it out. However, the modernisation agenda introduced by the Labour administration from 1997 onwards promoted a sharper focus on performance management and the role of stakeholders within the public sector. This heralded a new way of working for local government departments which has given rise to a different set of pressures and difficulties which have had to be addressed.

Over approximately the same period that the present Government has promoted this new approach to delivering public services, it has also supported the development of Inclusion for children with special educational needs both as a philosophy and a means of delivering education to this group of pupils. This has led to education authorities engaging in a systematic review of their policies and provision for pupils with SEN and, in many cases, the closure of many special schools which had traditionally catered for children with the most severe and complex needs.

## 1.2 Research Question

The focus of this dissertation is to examine the views of Liverpool Education Authority's (LEA) [1] principal stakeholders in relation to its Inclusion strategy for children with SEN and, in the light of this, whether the authority is likely to succeed in implementing its strategy. The purpose of the study is to assist the LEA in understanding the issues which are important to its key stakeholders in order that it can seek to address them.

## 1.3 Justification for the Research

Since the authority formally launched its Inclusion strategy in 2000, it has been engaged in ensuring that the various elements of the strategy are implemented according to the prescribed timescales and budgetary considerations. Whilst those stakeholders specifically affected by the particular strand of the strategy under consideration have been engaged at the time of its implementation, there has not thus far been an overall review of the authority's relationships with its key stakeholders and of their views. It is hoped that this study will serve that purpose and enable the LEA to reflect on what has been successful and the lessons that can be learned from experience so far. Put simply, how is the authority faring in the delivery of its Inclusion strategy as far as its chief stakeholders are concerned?

## 1.4 Methodology

The study will focus on three sets of primary stakeholders: schools; children and young people; parents/carers. Each of these groups has a different perspective on what the Inclusion strategy means for them and the focus of the research in each case will, therefore, differ. For schools, the aim of the research is to determine the extent of their understanding of the Council's Inclusion policy and to ascertain what the issues they would wish the Council

[1] *Since the commencement of this study, Liverpool LEA has ceased to exist and how now become a Children's Services Directorate*

to focus on in the future development and implementation of the strategy. For children and young people, the research aims to seek their views on whether pupils with SEN should attend mainstream or special schools and on how the Council should ensure that pupils with SEN have the same opportunities at school as all other children. Finally, for parents and carers, the research aims to establish their understanding of the term Inclusion, whether they feel they have any influence over the Council's strategy and the issues they would like the Council to consider in the future development of the strategy.

### 1.5 Outline of Chapters

**Chapter 1**: Introduction

The broad fields of study relating to stakeholder theory and Inclusion are outlined in this chapter. The aims and justification for the research as well as the basis for the methodology are discussed.

**Chapter 2**: Literature Review

The fields of study relating to stakeholder theory and how it is applied to organisations, including public sector organisations, are presented in more detail together with the key literature pertaining to the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs.

**Chapter 3**: Methodology

This chapter details the research methods undertaken in order to address the research question and objectives. It explains the research approach and design, the method of data collection in respect of the three stakeholder groups and examines the ethical considerations employed.

**Chapter 4**: Findings

The findings relating to the views of the three particular stakeholder groups towards inclusion in general and Liverpool's Inclusion strategy in particular are presented in detail together with the case study.

**Chapter 5**: Conclusions and Implications

Findings for each research question are summarised from chapter 4 and explained within this and prior research examined in chapter 2. A critical evaluation of the adopted methodology is presented describing how successful the chosen methodology fitted the type of research undertaken. Limitations of the study are discussed along with opportunities for further research.

**Chapter 6**: Recommendations

This chapter outlines recommendations for future action which stem from the research which are aimed at assisting the City Council to implement its Inclusion strategy successfully.

## 1.6 Definitions

### Special Educational Needs

Children have special educational needs if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. They have a learning difficulty if they:

a) have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age; or

b) have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in schools within the area of the local education authority

c) are under compulsory school age and fall within the definition of a) or b) above or would do so if special educational provision was not made for them. (Education Act 1996)

### Inclusion

In this context, the term inclusion has been used principally to describe the education of children and young people with special educational needs in mainstream schools.

### Stakeholders

Those groups who are affected, to a greater or lesser extent, by the realisation of an organisation's objectives.

## 1.7 Summary

This chapter has introduced the focus of the research problem and articulated the research question. The need for research has been justified, definitions have been presented, the methodology briefly described and justified and the basic structure of the report has been outlined.

# 2. Literature Review

## 2.1 Stakeholder Theory

The implementation of Liverpool Education Authority's Inclusion Strategy for pupils with SEN will be approached for the purposes of this dissertation in the context of stakeholder theory.

The term 'stakeholder' has become widespread in recent years and first arose in the USA as a response to the emphasis being placed on financial value led by the figure of the shareholder. According to Mercier (1999), stakeholders are 'all of the agents for whom the firm's development and good health are of prime concern'. Freeman (1984) defines them as 'any group or individual that can affect or be affected by the realization of a company's objectives'. This more inclusive sense of stakeholder has been widely adopted, as has the view that organisations should be conducted for the benefit of all their stakeholders.

Caroll (1989) argues that nowadays we tend to distinguish between: 'primary' stakeholders – referring to those actors who entertain a direct and contractually-determined relationship with the organisation and 'secondary' stakeholders – those who are situated at the borders of the organisation and who may be impacted by its actions without having any contractual connection to it. Clarkson (1995) also drew the distinction between primary and secondary stakeholders. According to him, 'a primary stakeholder group is one without whose continuing participation the organisation cannot survive as a going concern'. Whereas Evan and Freeman (1993) view stakeholders in terms of whether or not they are influenced by an organisation, Clarkson considers the most important distinction between those that influence an organisation and those who do not. For most organisations, primary stakeholders will include government, customers and suppliers. Secondary stakeholders include communities and, in some cases, the management of the organisation itself.

Other distinctions exist as well, including internal stakeholders, 'traditional' external ones and other external ones with the power to influence matters

(Pesqueux & Damak-Ayadi 2005). Pelle Culpin (1998) proposes a further distinction between institutional stakeholders, i.e. those involved in laws, regulations or any professional organisations that may be particular to a specific industry; economic stakeholders, i.e. those operating in the markets of the organisation in question; and ethical stakeholders from ethical and political pressure groups.

Evan and Freeman (1993) classify stakeholders as narrow and wide, the criteria being which stakeholders are affected by the organisation's policies and strategies. Narrow stakeholders (those that are the most affected) typically include shareholders, management, employees, suppliers and customers that are dependent on the organisation's output. Wider stakeholders (those less affected) may include government, the wider community and other peripheral groups. This model may lead us to conclude that an organisation has a higher degree of responsibility and accountability to its narrower stakeholders.

Mahoney (1994) divided stakeholders into active and passive stakeholders, active being those that seek to participate in the organisation's activities. They may or may not form part of an organisation's formal structure. Management and employees clearly fall into this active category but this group may also include groups from outside an organisation, e.g. pressure groups. Passive stakeholders are those that do not normally seek to participate in an organisation's policy-making. This does not necessarily mean that they are less interested or less powerful but that they do not take an active part in the organisation's strategy. Passive stakeholders normally include shareholders, government and local communities.

In order to apply these ideas to the stakeholders involved in Liverpool's Inclusion strategy, we must first establish who those stakeholders are (see fig. 1) and which have the most importance or influence.

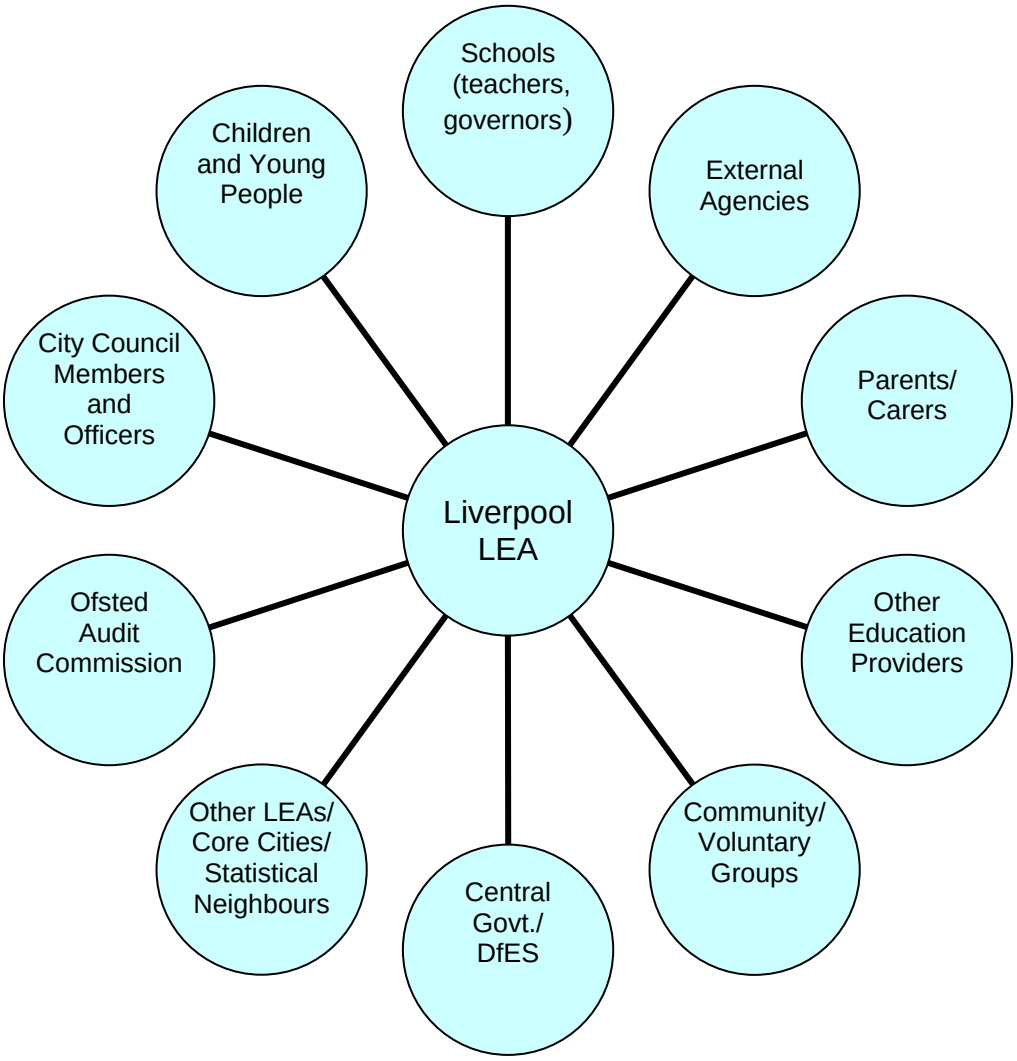


***Fig.1: Liverpool LEA Stakeholders***

According to Nwankwo and Richardson (1996), systematic stakeholder mapping involves a formal process of identifying those people who are likely to have an interest or stake in a proposed development and the mapping of these people to create a diagram which indicates their relationship, with the organisation at the centre of the development.

Once the various stakeholder groups have been identified, the next step is to consider the extent to which they are likely to support or obstruct a proposed strategic development. Campbell, Stonehouse & Houston (2002) suggest that a useful model for demonstrating how stakeholders exert influence on an organisation's objectives is that of Mendelow (1991). According to this model,

stakeholders can be ranked depending upon two factors: the stakeholder's interest and power. Stakeholder power refers to the ability to influence the organisation and stakeholder interest refers to the willingness to influence the organisation. In other words, interest concerns the extent to which the stakeholder cares about what the organisation does. It follows then that stakeholder influence = power x interest.

The actual influence that a stakeholder has will depend upon where they are positioned with respect to ability to influence and willingness to influence. A stakeholder with both high power and high interest will be more influential than one with low power and low interest. It is possible to map stakeholders by showing the two variables as in fig. 2.

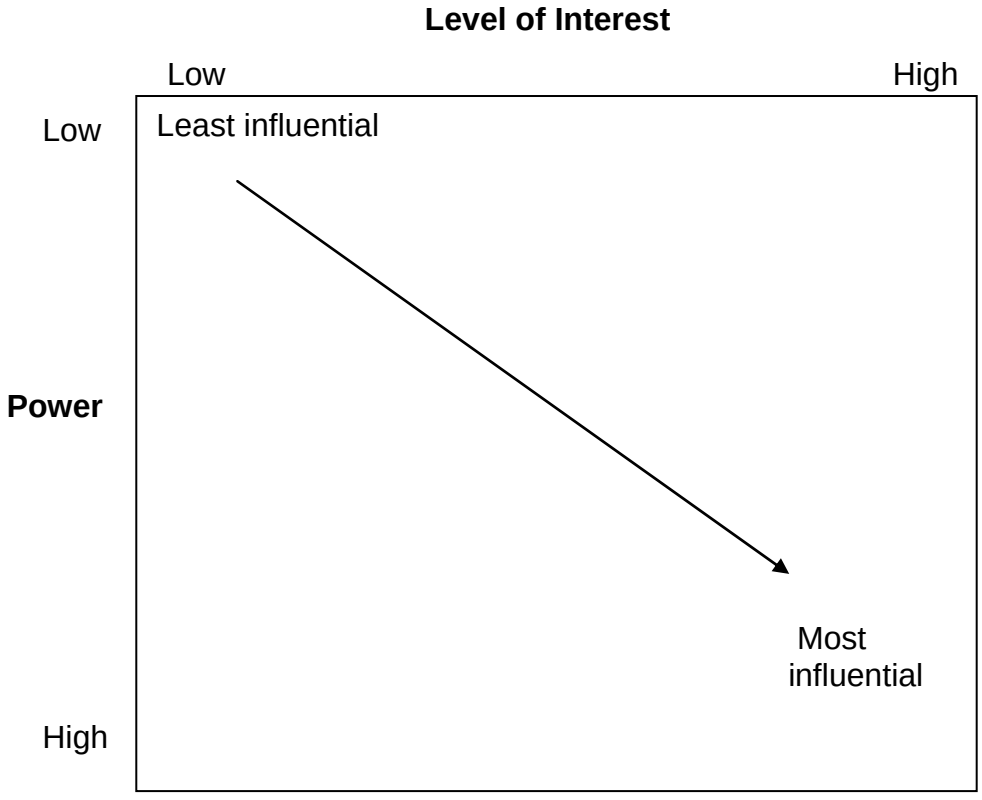


***Fig.2: The Power/Interest Matrix (Mendelow, 1991)***

The map can tell us two things:

- which stakeholder is likely to exert the most influence upon the organisation's objectives and:
- the stakeholders that are most likely to be in potential conflict over strategic objectives.

The stakeholder groups who are most likely to be affected by Liverpool's Inclusion Strategy can now be put into the matrix (Fig. 3).

**Level of Interest**

| **Power** | Low | High |
|---|---|---|
| Low | Other Education Providers<br>Other LEAs/core cities etc.<br><br>**Minimal effort**<br><br>**A** | Community/Voluntary Groups<br>External agencies<br>**Parents/Carers**<br>**Children and Young People**<br><br>**Keep informed**<br><br>**B** |
| High | City Council Members<br>**Schools**<br><br>**Keep satisfied**<br><br>**C** | Central Govt./DfES<br>Ofsted, Audit Commission<br><br>**Key Players**<br><br>**D** |

***Fig.3: Liverpool LEA's Power/Interest Matrix vis a vis the Inclusion Agenda***

The matrix indicates the type of relationship which organisations might seek to establish with stakeholder groups in the different quadrants. The acceptability of Liverpool's Inclusion Strategy to the DfES, Ofsted and the Audit Commission is, clearly, of major importance. Although the stakeholders in quadrant C, i.e. Councillors and schools, may generally be relatively passive

with regard to the strategy, their influence if underestimated could potentially thwart its success if they reposition themselves to segment D. It could be argued that Liverpool LEA should seek to raise the level of interest of these powerful stakeholders, possibly followed by participation to increase their ownership of the strategy (Johnson & Scholes, 2001). Those organisations in segment B, i.e. community/voluntary groups, parents/carers and children and young people, might traditionally have had their expectations addressed through information. Such stakeholders can be vitally important to an organisation in influencing the views of more powerful stakeholders.

For the purposes of this dissertation, we will be examining the role of three different stakeholder groups: schools, parents and carers and children and young people. These three groups can all be deemed to be 'primary 'stakeholders (Caroll, 1989 & Clarkson, 1995); 'narrow' (Evan & Freeman, 1995) and 'active' (Mahoney, 1994).

Stakeholder mapping in this way can assist in promoting a better understanding of the following issues (Johnson and Scholes, 2002):

- Whether the levels of interest and power of stakeholders adequately reflect the corporate governance framework within which the strategy is being developed;
- Who are likely to be the main supporters and opponents of a strategy and how this could be addressed;
- Whether organisations should consider trying to reposition certain stakeholders, for example to ensure that there are more key players who will support a particular strategy;
- The extent to which stakeholders may need assistance in maintaining their levels of interest or power.

These questions raise a number of important ethical considerations which managers should bear in mind in deciding their role in the political activity surrounding strategic change. For example, is it the role of the manager to try and balance the conflicting aspirations of the various stakeholder groups or are they accountable to one key stakeholder?

One way of conceptualising stakeholder theory is as a social contract, under which social institutions can only enjoy social legitimacy if they continually modify their policies and activities in line with societal opinion.

## 2.2 Organisation-Stakeholder Relationship

In looking at the organisation-stakeholder relationship, we can examine why organisations do not always take account of stakeholder concerns in their strategy formulation and implementation. Donaldson and Preston (1995) drew a distinction between two motivations describing why organisations accede to stakeholder concerns. They describe the two motivations as instrumental and normative. The instrumental view posits that organisations take stakeholder opinions into account only if they are consistent with other, more important objectives, e.g. profit-maximisation, or in the case of a public service, financial savings. The normative view of stakeholder theory argues that organisations should accommodate stakeholder concerns, not because of the benefits it may give the organisation but because it observes a moral duty to each stakeholder. This view sees stakeholders as ends in themselves and not as merely instrumental to the achievement of other ends.

A reasonable criticism of the stakeholder model is that it fails to explain how managers are able to treat each stakeholder in an equitable manner. How are they to prioritise, or choose between them when critical decisions must be taken which will result in a benefit to one at the expense of another?

Stakeholder doctrines have become a staple of management theory and conventional business ethics and the subject of extensive academic examination. Whilst the majority of literature on this topic would appear to appreciate the value of stakeholder theory to an organisation, there are also a number of strong critics, including Sternberg (1997) who argues that stakeholder theory is incompatible with business because the definitive stakeholder aim of balancing benefits for all stakeholders precludes all objectives which favour particular groups. Further, she argues that balancing stakeholder benefits is an unworkable objective. This is because the number of people who can affect or are affected by an organisation is infinite and that

for a balance to be struck, their numbers would somehow have to be limited. But stakeholder theory does not give any guidance as to how such a selection could occur nor how individuals who belong to more than one stakeholder group should be dealt with. Even if the stakeholder groups could be identified and restricted to a manageable number, Sternberg argues that stakeholder theory does not explain what should count as a benefit and raises some important questions:

- Should everything that a stakeholder regards as beneficial be taken into account?

- How are the managers to know what stakeholders consider to be benefits when even members of the same notional stakeholder group often have significantly different views as to what is beneficial?

Sternberg develops the argument further by pointing out that even if the relevant benefits could be identified, stakeholder theory provides no guidance as to how a balance can be achieved. Given the divergent interests of the different stakeholder groups, that which benefits one group can often harm another. Stakeholder theory does not assist with this dilemma. In practice, what tends to happen is that the goals of the organisation are used to identify which groups need to be considered and which of their benefits are relevant and legitimate.

Although Sternberg, amongst others, is highly critical of the value of stakeholder theory, she does acknowledge that there is some meaningful use for the concept of stakeholder. Firstly, it serves as a convenient label for the various groups and individuals that organisations need to take into account when pursuing their objectives. Secondly, it can serve to illuminate the proper meaning of ‘social responsibility’, i.e. if individuals have views as to how organisations should be conducted, they should ensure that their individual choices accurately reflect those views. When each potential stakeholder acts conscientiously in their personal capacity and strategically bestows or withholds their support on the basis of their moral values, then this will automatically lead organisations to reflect those values. Although this concept

can possibly best be applied to the business world, it nonetheless has some value to the public sector as well.

### 2.3 What is Inclusion?

CSIE is the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education. It is an independent centre working in the UK and overseas to promote inclusion and end segregation and is funded by donations from trusts, foundations and grants. Their definition of inclusive education is 'all children and young people – with or without disabilities or difficulties – learning together in ordinary pre-school provision, schools, colleges and universities with appropriate networks of support' (CSIE, 2002).

This definition, however, as with many others, describes an ideal situation to which we might aspire. A more realistic interpretation of the current situation on educational inclusion in this country, as recognised by CSIE, is to view inclusion as a journey in which individual education authorities and indeed schools, are at different stages of the process. CSIE's position is that full inclusion means the deconstruction and eventual closure of separate special schools, the transfer of resources to the mainstream sector and the restructuring of ordinary schools.

The Salamanca Declaration (Unesco, 1994) has been used in many parts of the world to formulate strategies towards inclusive schooling. It states that 'inclusive schools' are the most effective at building solidarity between children with special needs and their peers'.

Since 1997, the present Government has been committed to improving the educational experience of children with SEN. It has produced a series of policy and guidance documents to LEAs including a new SEN Code of Practice (2001) as well as enacting a number of Acts of Parliament.

However, the Audit Commission's report Special Educational Needs – a mainstream issue (2002) highlighted a number of continuing challenges, the most relevant to this report being that children who should be taught in

mainstream settings are sometimes turned away and many staff feel ill equipped to meet the wide range of pupil needs.

In response to this report, the Government published its national strategy for SEN: Removing Barriers to Achievement (2004) in which it sets out its vision for enabling children with SEN and disabilities to succeed and sets a new agenda for improvement and action at national and local level. This includes a programme of enhanced collaboration between mainstream and special schools with the sharing of expertise and experience and an emphasis on improved specialist advice and support for mainstream schools by developing generic minimum standards for SEN support services.

The Government has enshrined its policy on Inclusion in primary legislation, the 1996 Education Act and the SEN and Disability Act 2001 being the principal frameworks. The latter introduced a stronger right for children to be educated at a mainstream school and prohibits schools from discriminating in their admission arrangements, in the education and associated services provided by the school for its pupils and in relation to exclusions from the school.

In addition to national legislation and guidance, the two main drivers for change are the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Audit Commission. Ofsted's report, SEN and Disability: towards inclusive schools, 2004, sought to assess the extent to which the vision of inclusion is becoming a reality in schools and to make recommendations to support the Government's strategy for SEN. The report's key findings include the following:

- The Government's revised Inclusion framework has contributed to a growing awareness of the benefits of inclusion, and response to it has led to some improvement in practice;

- Most mainstream schools are now committed to meeting special needs. A few are happy to admit pupils with complex needs. The admission and retention of pupils with social and behavioural difficulties continue to test the inclusion policy;

- The teaching seen of pupils with SEN was of varying quality, with a high proportion of lessons having shortcomings. Support be teaching assistants can be vital;

- Effective partnership work between mainstream schools and special schools on curriculum and teaching is the exception rather than the rule.

Liverpool's own Ofsted inspection of 1999 highlighted some major weaknesses in the LEA's SEN policies. In particular, it referred to the high proportion of pupils educated in special schools in the city compared to other local authorities. A follow-up inspection in 2000 showed that some progress had been made towards developing a clear and detailed strategic plan in relation to Inclusion. The subsequent inspection conducted in 2003 concluded that there had been 'improvement in almost all aspects of the LEA's support for SEN since the inspection in 2000'. More pupils were being educated in mainstream schools and the implementation of the SEN strategy was found to be well led by officers.

The Audit Commission's report (2002) highlighted some significant findings, some of the key ones being as follows:

- Whilst some schools have placed great emphasis on developing an inclusive ethos, others have far to go. Some children with SEN are regularly excluded from certain lessons and extra-curricular activities and most children who are permanently excluded from school have SEN;

- Many teachers feel ill-equipped to meet the needs of pupils with SEN;

- There is a real tension between the standards agenda and the policy of Inclusion.

The report stresses that resources, both human and financial are a key determinant of how much support schools are able to offer individual pupils

and expresses concern about both the effectiveness of resource allocation by LEAs and schools' management of SEN resources.

District Audit's report, Provision for Pupils with SEN – Liverpool City Council, 2001, concluded that due to the relatively high proportion of pupils in special schools, especially in the secondary phase, the LEA was in danger of being perceived as not addressing the Government's agenda on inclusive education.

Since the Inclusion Strategy became Council policy in 2000, Liverpool LEA has closed or commenced the process of closure of nine special schools. At this point in time, there remain 14 special schools in operation. The Strategy aims by 2014-2015 to have only four special schools: one day/residential school for boys with behaviour, emotional and social development needs; one school for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder and two schools for pupils with severe learning difficulties.

### 2.4 The Liverpool Context

Liverpool has a very strong historical tradition of special schools provision and has always had one of the highest special school populations in the country (fig. 4).

It is, therefore, starting the journey towards Inclusion from a low baseline. In keeping with tradition, there is an entrenched expectation amongst mainstream schools and many parents that special schools are the appropriate vehicle for meeting the needs of children with SEN.

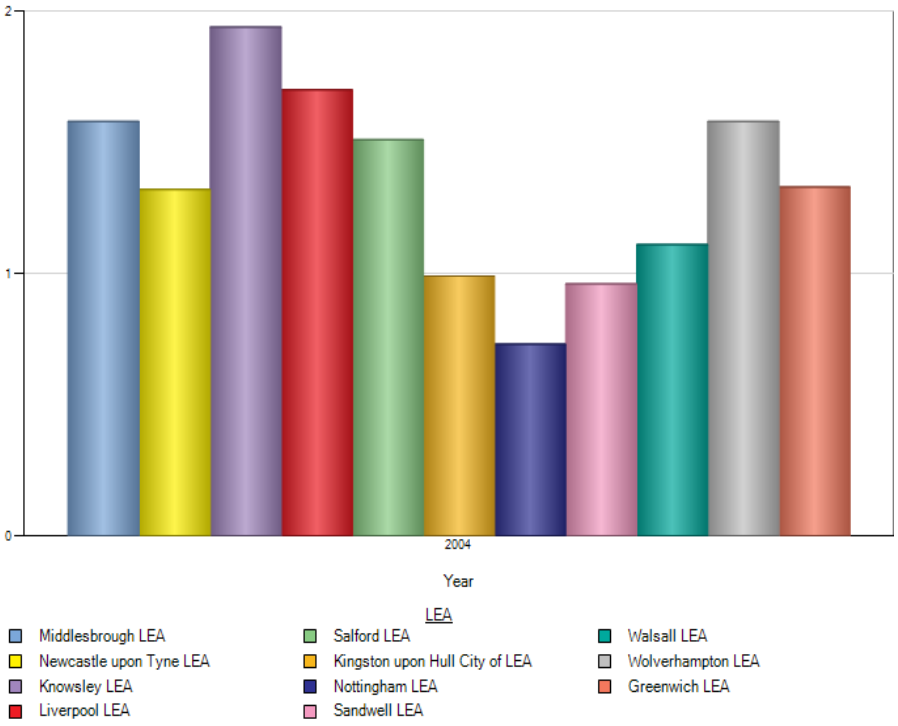


***Fig. 4: Liverpool's position in comparison with its statistical neighbours in the number of pupils placed in special schools (Source: National Performance Framework)***

The impact of the decline of the shipbuilding industry, so prominent and prosperous in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, has led to Liverpool becoming amongst the highest areas of social deprivation in Europe. Unemployment is high and there has been a steady decline in population over the last 30 years. There is some evidence to suggest that there is a correlation between the incidence of Special Educational Needs and socio-economic factors. Some would argue that a City such as Liverpool needs special schools owing to the high levels of deprivation and special educational need. Liverpool has the highest level of social deprivation in the country. Its position vis a vis its statistical neighbours can be seen at fig. 5.

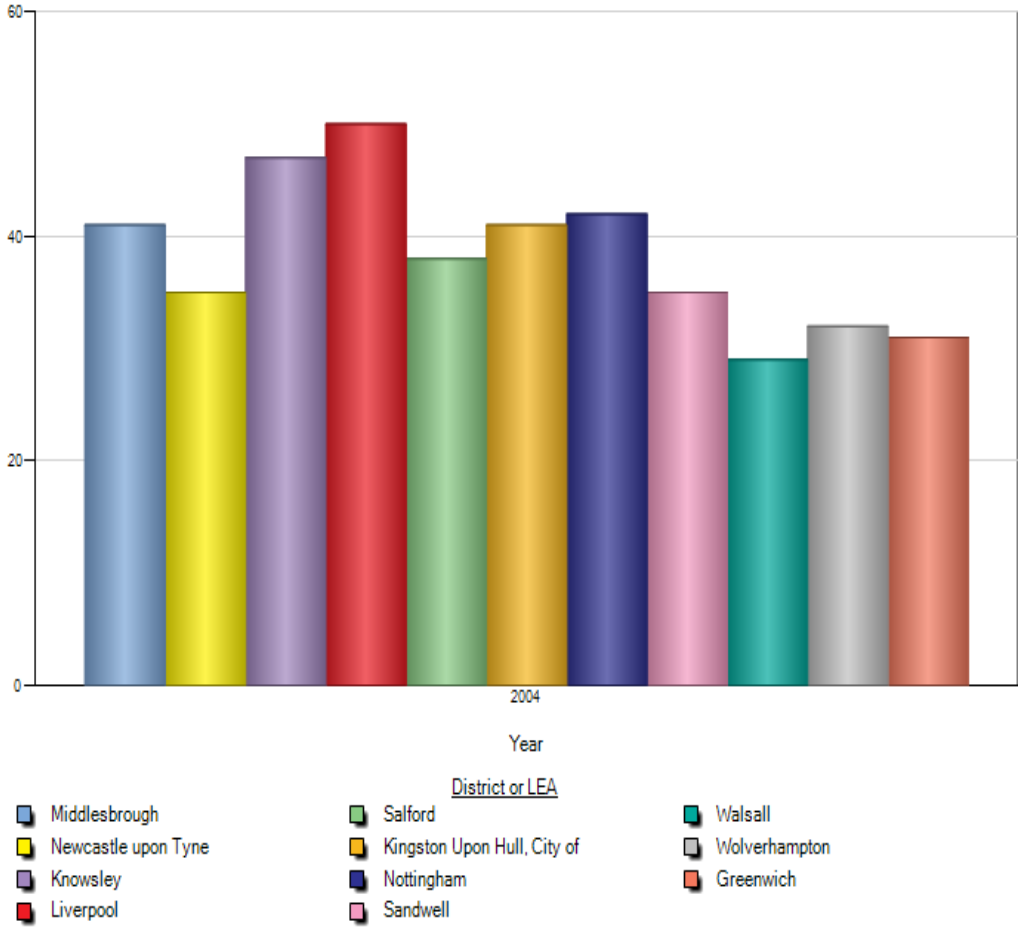


***Fig. 5: Indices of Multiple Deprivation- Liverpool in comparison with its statistical neighbours (Source: National Performance Framework)***

## 2.5 Schools

It was determined earlier that, in terms of stakeholder theory, schools sat in the high power/low interest category in the Power/Interest matrix as far as the Inclusion strategy is concerned. This is based on the fact that traditionally, mainstream schools have not been as involved in the delivery of the inclusion agenda as they have been in the last twenty years. Even today, for a variety of reasons, many schools have not engaged with the concept of inclusion to any great degree and have tended to view the education of children and young people with SEN to be a local authority responsibility. In recent years, the impetus of inclusion has grown rapidly and schools have been obliged to work more closely with local authorities in meeting the needs of pupils with a wide range of SEN and disabilities. Government policy supports the principle

that children with SEN should, wherever possible, be educated in mainstream schools.

It is easy to understand why there are often tensions between schools and local education authorities on the subject of inclusion. As Ainscow and Tweddle (2001) recognise, in a climate in which the power of LEAs has gradually been eroded and there is increasing emphasis on school-led improvement strategies, it will be more difficult for LEAs to implement their inclusion strategies. The current debate taking place by the Education and Skills All Party Select Committee on how we should educate children with disabilities or other special needs will undoubtedly raise a number of additional issues.

One of the reasons why there has been significant pressure in the recent past to close some special schools has been because of the variable quality of special educational needs provision. Ofsted's report: Special Educational Needs and Disability: towards inclusive schools (2004) which looked into how children with special needs are being integrated into mainstream schools, highlighted doubts about the quality of teaching for special needs pupils and uncertainty about their expected levels of achievement.

Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden (2002) who conducted an in-depth case study of an effective inclusive secondary schools concluded that inclusivity in education may conflict with the principle of excellence as measured by academic achievement. It may mean, for example, that schools with a high proportion of SEN pupils may lose academically able students to other schools which do not have an SEN 'label'. This dilemma, they argue, brings into question prevailing notions of effectiveness, particularly whether a school is effective if it produces good academic outcomes, irrespective of social outcomes.

Pearpoint & Forest (2005a) explain how both inclusion and change are inevitable and whether we choose to grow with and from these changes is a choice. The real topic under discussion, they believe, is fear of change, and state specifically that in the field of education, there is a great fear of new

responsibilities, a fear of what is not understood and a fear of being accountable. The article cites examples of where teachers have protested the following;

- We don't have enough money.
- I haven't been trained to take care of those!
- I didn't choose special education
- I don't have time to create special programs for "them".

Pearpoint & Forest (2005b) explore solutions to making inclusive education a viable option for students who exhibit severe behavioural problems. They argue that even those children can and should be included in the mainstream of our schools and communities and that the key to making it possible is relationships. For them, a fundamental element of relationships is that everyone has a role to play and that the answer lies in harnessing the talent, creativity, commitment and resources of those who are labelled as problems.

Blandford, in her article 'Teachers have special needs too' (Education Guardian 2004), highlighted the concerns expressed in schools at the management and level of resourcing associated with SEN. As it is principally the job of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) to manage staff, pupils, parents and external agencies in providing the most appropriate education for pupils with SEN, it is the SENCOs who encounter the daily concerns voiced by their colleagues.

SENCOs are rarely trained, either as experts in SEN or as managers. Yet they take on responsibility for the most difficult and complex of tasks – the management of individual needs. Most SENCOs spend a large proportion of their time teaching and are also expected to attend meetings with external agencies, co-ordinate learning support assistants and convene meetings with pastoral and academic staff within their school. When not managing their teaching, or that of others, they have a mountain of documents to prepare, from the school's SEN/Inclusion policy to the individual education plans required for each child with SEN.

In her article, Blandford argues that all teachers should be given adequate training to manage and deliver a curriculum that responded to the needs of all pupils. This would help schools meet their inclusive aims that have featured in Government policies for many years. She also warns that if SENCOs continue to be so over-burdened, another generation of children with SEN will fail to be educated and that the building of capacity to support SEN provision has to be the next priority of Government.

There are some very positive examples of successful inclusive practice in mainstream schools across the country. Florian & Rouse (2001), building on work they had carried out earlier in 8 secondary schools, set out to investigate policies and practices in a further 5 schools with long-standing commitments to inclusive education. They found that these schools treated SEN as a challenge to develop practice for the benefit of all children, pupils with SEN participated in and belonged more fully to the school community and in one school visited, parents and pupils felt that school initiatives towards understanding of disability and diversity had helped to reduce bullying in the school as a whole.

Ofsted's latest report Inclusion: does it matter where pupils are taught? (2006) has highlighted that the most important factor in determining the best outcomes for pupils with SEN is not the *type* but the *quality* of provision. Effective provision was distributed equally in the mainstream and special schools visited, but there was more good and outstanding provision in resourced mainstream schools than elsewhere. Pupils with even the most severe and complex needs were able to make excellent progress in all types of settings. High quality, specialist teachers and a commitment by leaders to create opportunities to include all pupils were the keys to success. Pupils in mainstream schools where support from teaching assistants was the main type of provision were less likely to make good academic progress than those who had access to specialist teaching in those schools.

### 2.5.1 Inclusion and the Standards Agenda

One of the perceived obstacles to Inclusion appear to be the tension between the standards agenda and Inclusion policies. Headteachers can be reluctant

to admit pupils with SEN into their schools because of the impact this may have on 'league tables' of school performance. When conducting research leading to the production of their report 'Special Educational Needs: A Mainstream Issue (2002), the Audit Commission came across the following comments:

***' I am all for inclusion, but when a child arrives with high levels of need my heart sinks because we don't have the resources to support them and because of the effect on the SATs results.'*** (Headteacher)

***'SEN kids are included in the performance indicators, so they drag them down…they need to find ways to recognise what the school is achieving with kids with SEN.'.*** (Headteacher)

***'We were lucky that he was able to sit his SATs as they said he would not be allowed to if his behaviour was not up to standard – they didn't think he would get the grades'.*** (Mother)

Schools are judged largely on the basis of the progress they make with children who do not have substantial learning difficulties, ie. those who are capable of reaching national benchmarks such as 5 A-C grades at GCSE. A school that is highly inclusive is likely, almost by definition, to have a higher proportion of pupils at the lower end of the attainment spectrum. It may therefore appear to perform poorly in a league table. Conversely, a school that is not welcoming to children with SEN may appear to be a 'good school' simply because it has fewer pupils with learning difficulties.

Moves towards 'value-added' tables will undoubtedly help the Inclusion agenda as these will enable more meaningful judgements to be drawn up about how a school has helped its pupils to progress. But even these may not do justice to the achievements of children with significant levels of need, whose progress may need to be measured in very small steps and may perhaps only be compared meaningfully with children with similar levels of need.

The New Relationship with Schools (NRwS) is a Central Government initiative designed to give schools greater autonomy. The Education and

Inspections Bill (2006) will empower schools by devolving as much decision-making as possible while giving local authorities an enhanced strategic role as the champion of pupils and parents. Hand in hand with increased autonomy for schools is an increasing responsibility for their own finances and a key say in local funding decisions. These changes in the relationship between local authorities and schools could have potential implications for the Inclusion agenda and raises the following questions?

- What power will the local authority have to direct schools to admit pupils with SEN?
- What control could the local authority exert upon schools which do not spend the resources allocated for SEN on the pupils for whom it was intended?
- What influence could the local authority exert over poor inclusive practice in schools?

### 2.5.2 Funding Issues

Ofsted's (2004) report revealed a number of significant findings as far as SEN funding is concerned:

- Funding arrangements were identified by some headteachers as a major barrier to inclusion;
- Those schools in LEAs which delegated more funding for pupils with statements were able to manage their staff more effectively;
- Smaller primary schools had much less flexible funding than large ones and usually less scope for economies of scale.

However, the Audit Commission/HMI's report (1992) on special education found that on average it was no more expensive to educate a child with learning difficulties in a mainstream school than in a special school but that resources were not being moved to the mainstream as pupils were included. CSIE (2002) believes that the real barrier to inclusive education is not lack of money, but attitudes and a lack of commitment to transfer resources from segregated to mainstream settings.

## 2.6 Children and Young People

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) is the world's most widely accepted human rights agreement. It applies to children and young people aged under 18. Article 12 states that young people have the right to say what they think and to be listened to by adults when decisions are made affecting their care and education. Willow (2002) recognises that 'participation is the keystone of the arch that is the UNCRC. Without the active participation of children and young people in the promotion of their rights to a good childhood, none will be achieved effectively'. The UNCRC has made a positive impact on legislation to improve opportunities for young people to participate. The Children Act 2004 provides the legislative foundation for whole-system reform to support the improvement of the lives of children, young people and their families. Every Child Matters: Change for Children (2004) sets out the national framework for local change programmes to build services around the needs of children and young people.

Traditionally, local authorities have not engaged directly with children and young people in the planning and delivery of their services. However, the present Government has pledged its commitment to designing policies and services around the needs of children and young people (CYPU, 2001). The Government believes that the result of effective participation will help achieve its key ambitions of preventing and tackling the social exclusion of the significant majority of children who experience poverty and disadvantage.

The core principles for partnership which Government departments are all committed to, as set out in 'Learning to Listen: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People' (2001), include:

- A visible commitment to involving children and young people, underpinned by appropriate resources to build capacity to implement policies of participation;

- Children and young people's involvement is valued;

- Children and young people have equal opportunities to get involved;

- Policies and standards for the participation of children and young people are provided, evaluated and continually improved.

There is a considerable body of literature (Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin and Sinclair, 2003) on the rationale for involving children and young people in public decision-making and on the methods of involvement. However, as Partridge (2005) points out, there is considerably less written on the impact or outcomes of their involvement and on the quality of participation (Kirby and Bryson, 2002). The existing research has tended to concentrate on the impact on children and young people themselves rather than on the services and organisations involved and points to positive benefits including increased confidence and self-esteem, new knowledge and skills, improved achievement at school and raised aspirations (Hannam, 2000).

However, there is some evidence of negative outcomes for children and young people where their involvement is regarded as tokenistic, e.g. a feeling a disillusionment and subsequent disengagement (RBA Research, 2002). There are very few examples of participation initiatives that have provided training or support for the adults involved despite general recognition that working participatively requires a major cultural shift for most organisations. This is particularly pertinent to the involvement of children and young people with SEN where different approaches and methods of engagement will often be required.

Most of the research emphasises the importance of the commitment of senior managers within an organisation to participation and the vital role played by champions (Geddes and Rus, 1999; Shenton, 1999). Formal systems and structures are needed to ensure that the involvement of children and young people is not tokenistic.

Kirby et al (2003) identify four stages that may be necessary in order to change cultures and embed participatory practice in organisations:

- ***Unfreeze*** existing attitudes and methods of working;
- ***Catalyse*** change through the use of champions, collaboration, funding;
- ***Internalise*** change through developing a shared vision and understanding of participation in practice, acknowledge conflict/opposition and evaluate progress;
- ***Institutionalise*** in mainstream practice.

Sustaining and embedding participation in organisations is a crucial issue as Children's Services move towards greater integration at strategic and operational levels. However, the concept of real empowerment is a demanding one since an essential component of increasing the power and influence of children and young people is the surrendering of adult control. Partridge (2005) found that children and young people of all ages, circumstances and abilities can act with great responsibility when trusted, trained and supported to do so. They are able to make responsible and fair decisions and offer helpful and practical solutions to problems that adults may not have considered. The experience is positive for children and young people as long as their views and needs are respected, feedback is guaranteed, their time and expertise is recognised and the whole process is fun. It can help to raise confidence and self-esteem and make children and young people feel valued and important.

There is very little research that has been published nationally on the views of children and young people on inclusion. However, Smart (2000) explored the role of children's attitudes to SEN as a foundation for successful inclusion in schools. The chosen methodology involved a quasi-experimental design using questionnaires, sentence completions and video-ed circle time, which investigated the children's cognitive understanding of disability, affective responses to it and behavioural intentions of actions towards children with disabilities. Her report concluded that the programme of interaction between children from a mainstream school and a neighbouring special school had significant effects on the reported attitudes of the mainstream pupils.

## 2.7 Parents and Carers

The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (2001) sets out the Government's expectations for the involvement of parents of pupils with SEN in the decisions affecting their children. It offers some key principles for effective communication by suggesting that those working with parents should:

- acknowledge and draw on parental knowledge and expertise in relation to their child;
- focus on the children's strengths as well as areas of additional need;
- recognise the personal and emotional investment of parents and be aware of their feelings;
- ensure that parents understand procedures, are aware of how to access support in preparing their contributions, and are given documents to be discussed well before meetings;
- respect the validity of differing perspectives and seek constructive ways of reconciling different viewpoints;
- respect the differing needs parents themselves may have, such as a disability, or communication and linguistic barriers;
- recognise the need for flexibility in the timing and structure of meetings.

The Code of Practice acknowledges the importance of empowering parents to enable them to recognise and fulfil their responsibilities as parents and play an active and valued role in their child's education; have knowledge of their child's entitlement within the SEN framework; make their views known about how their child is educated and have access to information, advice and support during assessment and any related decision-making processes about special educational provision.

All local authorities must make arrangements for parent partnership services and ensure that parents, schools and others are aware of how they can access the service. The aim of parent partnership services is to ensure that parents of children with additional needs have access to information, advice and guidance so they can make appropriate, informed decisions.

The Government's Strategy for SEN: 'Removing Barriers to Achievement' (2004) attempts to address some of the problems faced by parents in accessing support from their local school, local authority education and social services and the health service. It recognises that a culture of mistrust has developed in some areas whereby parents feel they need to fight for the support to which their child is entitled. There is often confusion about what provision should be made by the school and what provision should be made by the local authority, giving rise to disputes, delays and gaps in support. The Government seeks to build on the success of local parent partnership services and consider the scope for increasing their effectiveness and impact.

Every Child Matters (ECM): Change for Children (2004) sets out a national framework for change across the whole system of children's services. One of the central tenets of this change agenda is the involvement of parents, carers and families in the development and delivery of multi-agency services. There are three main areas in which parents can be actively involved:

- **Participation in Consultation and Planning**

The voluntary sector can be used effectively in engaging with parents and carers. Rather than holding formal, business-oriented meetings with parents, it is suggested that it is often better to hold 'fun' events to attract more people. Clearly, the disadvantage of this approach is that the informal structure of such events can make it difficult to discuss service details. It is also advised that services should avoid 'consultation fatigue' by overloading parents at an early stage.

Consultation processes can reach many people although they often do not allow for any in-depth discussion. More information and input can be gained if parents are involved in service planning which can take a number of forms.

Parent forums, for example, help provide a formal structure for the voice of parents and carers to be heard. It can be less daunting for parents to work in a group with others in a similar situation. Another option is to involve parents in working groups to look at different aspects of service development. It is important, however, that the needs of parents are taken into account when setting up and holding meetings. For example, meetings need to be held at a time and location that is convenient for parents; jargon should be avoided and the group has to be inclusive and allow for all members to express their views. In some cases, parent representatives may find training helpful in equipping them with the techniques and confidence to understand and represent the views of others.

- **Participation in Service Delivery**

The ECM guidance offers two main ways in which organisations can involve parents in service delivery. The first is involvement in governance which entails parents sitting on steering groups either as members or even the chair. Parents are increasingly being involved in interviewing and selecting the service manager and other key staff. The second is working for the service which can be achieved either through actual employment or voluntary assistance in particular initiative. Positions such as parent liaison workers lend themselves very well to the employment of parents who, in many cases, will have built up contacts and trust within the local community.

- **Participation as Service Users**

Given the profound effect that parents and carers have on children and young people's well-being, they are likely to be key partners in any work to support children and young people with additional needs. Engaging with parents in a variety of different ways such as disseminating leaflets, hosting one-off community events, outreach programmes, home visiting, drop-ins, use of local media etc. can all help to promote awareness of the service.

Although it is with the needs of children and young people in mind that education authorities have to plan and make provision, it is parents and carers who have traditionally been the key stakeholder group with whom authorities have engaged in addressing the needs of pupils with SEN.

Parents' views on Inclusion are extremely wide-ranging and diverse and are often influenced by a number of factors including: their own educational experiences; the specific needs of their children; their children's experiences at school and the levels of support their children can access in their area.

Some parental organisations and individual parents view Inclusion as a fundamental human right to which every child is entitled. For example, the Alliance for Inclusive Education (ALLFIE), a national network of individual families and groups, believes that all children and young people need to be educated in a single mainstream education system. Parents for Inclusion, a sister organisation, support the 2020 campaign, launched in 2004, to close all special schools and colleges in the UK by 2020. Disability Equality in Education believes that Inclusion 'is a human rights issue about equality in the classroom – not just an issue of special needs'.

There are, however, equally strong views voiced by parents in support of the continuation of special schools. Mr. D. Clark (The Observer, 2006) acknowledges that resources in the current education system are severely limited and that his daughter, a 16 year old girl on the autistic spectrum, could never handle mainstream education. Mr. S. Chinn (Times Educational Supplement, 2005) advocates the right of parents to choose special schools if they feel that is the best option for their child and argues that the inclusion principle, applied universally, denies him and his child their human right to choice.

What is interesting, however, is that there appears to be no evidence that those parents who support special schools, do so on the basis of a philosophical belief that segregation is the ideal system of education for their children but rather that special education is sometimes the only option available to them given the inability of the mainstream system to meet their children's needs.

# 3. Research Methodology

## 3.1 Research Approach

In determining the best approach to be used for this study, the two principal types of research methodology, positivist and phenomenological, were considered. Account was taken that positivism is most appropriate to research which involves 'working with an observable social reality and that the end-product of such research can be law-like generalisations similar to those produced by the physical and natural scientists' (Remedy, Williams, Money and Swartz,1998). This approach would have entailed the adoption of an objective, analytical stance, interpreting the data in a detached, neutral manner. It would also have involved an emphasis on a highly structured methodology so as to facilitate replication (Gill & Johnson, 1997) and on quantifiable observations which can be easily analysed.

Given the nature of the research being undertaken, it was determined that a phenomenological or interpretavist approach was more appropriate, based on the view that it was necessary to explore the subjective meanings motivating people's actions in order to be able to make sense of and understand their motives, actions and intentions (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003). Within the phenomenological framework, it was acknowledged that some interaction would take place with the subjects of the research in an attempt to understand their views. The approach, therefore, was epistemological by nature as opposed to ontological. Use was also made of induction theory (building theory approaches) rather than deduction (testing theory).

## 3.2 Research Design

From the outset, it was determined that it would largely be qualitative data used for this research project due to their richness and fullness derived from the opportunity to explore a subject in a meaningful way (Robson, 2002). This, therefore, had implications for the collection and analysis of the data.

A number of semi-structured interviews was undertaken with a representative sample of the various stakeholder groups involved with the Inclusion strategy. These interviews were restricted to those stakeholders who were likely to have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the issues and included senior officers of the LEA, headteachers and parents. The purpose of the interviews was threefold:

- to enlist the support of the LEA in conducting the research and to seek permission to approach schools, children and young people and parents/carers;
- to ensure that the content of the proposed research was appropriate and meaningful both for the LEA and its key stakeholders;
- to seek advice and support on the best ways to approach the various stakeholder groups and to collect the data required.

### 3.3 Method of Collection

#### 3.3.1 Schools

A short questionnaire (appendix 1) was devised for all Liverpool schools (approximately 200) to complete. It was first envisaged that the questionnaire would be sent to the headteacher of each school but, after consultation with Senior Management of the LEA, it was agreed that it be sent electronically to the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) of each school. It was arranged so that responses could be sent either electronically to a central contact point within the LEA, or by mail.

#### 3.3.2 Children and Young People

Care was taken to adopt an approach to gaining information from children and young people that would help them to understand the issues involved and that would be representative of a wide range of different children, including those without special educational needs. A three-pronged method of data collection was used:

A short questionnaire (appendix 2) was put to the school councils of seven Liverpool schools, two primary, two secondary and three special. Exactly the same questions were given to each school and the questionnaires were completed within school with the support of school staff and the Liverpool Pupil Advocacy Service.

A second questionnaire (appendix 3) using the same questions as for the school councils was completed by the Liverpool Youth Council with the support of the Youth Engagement Team of the Liverpool Youth Service. Eleven young people took part in the completion of the questionnaire which they conducted as a group exercise. The age range of the young people was 13-19 and three of the eleven young people described themselves as having SEN.

A third questionnaire (appendix 4) using the same questions as for the school and youth councils was put to the School Parliament which meets on a termly basis at Liverpool Town Hall and is made of representatives from school councils across the City.

### 3.3.3 Parents and Carers

It was clear that a questionnaire sent out to Liverpool parents/carers without any contextual basis would not have elicited a high level of response. With the invaluable help and support of the Liverpool Parent and Carer Forum and from the LEA, a consultation day at a local venue was organised. A flier was produced to advertise the event in the Liverpool Parent and Carer Forum newsletter (appendix 5). Senior officers from the LEA were present and, after a presentation on the progress of Liverpool's Inclusion strategy by an LEA representative, parents and carers were split into smaller groups and asked to complete a questionnaire (appendix 6), either individually or as a small group. Each group was facilitated by an LEA officer or by the Co-ordinator of the Liverpool Parent and Carer Forum. Throughout the day, parents verbally contributed their views and comments on the Inclusion strategy and these were recorded in writing.

The parents/carers were asked to volunteer to be the subject of a case study for the research project which would enable an in-depth analysis of the effects of Liverpool's Inclusion strategy on a family to be carried out. One parent volunteered and arrangements were subsequently made to interview her at her home.

## 3.4 Ethical Considerations

For the purposes of this section, the suggestions made by Fisher (2004) will be utilised.

### 3.4.1 Negotiating access

#### 3.4.1.1 Negotiating terms of reference with Liverpool LEA

Discussions took place with senior officers of the LEA prior to undertaking this project in order to ensure that it did not duplicate any similar work being undertaken and that it gave sufficient scope for a wide range of perspectives to be considered. Given that the Council has funded the MBA course which has given rise to this research project, it seemed an important point of courtesy that they be consulted on the proposed research brief.

#### 3.4.1.2 Right to privacy

It was appreciated from the outset that there was no obligation on anyone to assist in the research. Consideration, therefore, had to be given to a contingency plan if insufficient people were willing to get involved.

#### 3.4.1.3 Informed consent

This did not pose any particular problems for the research as the majority of it was conducted via questionnaires. As far as the consultation with the Liverpool Parent and Carer Forum is concerned, it was agreed that they would be shown the extract of the report which related to their input at a future meeting of the Forum. With regard to the case studies, the interviews were written up and sent to the individuals concerned for approval before submission.

### 3.4.2 Data collection stage

#### 3.4.2.1 Objectivity and disinterestedness

Every effort was made to ensure that the views of participants were sought and recorded in a neutral and objective manner. Respect for all opinions and views was afforded where these were gained from face to face contact. The collection of data via the questionnaires to schools and the school councils, the Youth Council and the School Parliament removed this issue as a potential problem.

#### 3.4.2.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

It was made clear that no comments would be attributed to specific individuals or schools. Given that the questionnaire to schools was sent electronically, it would have been possible to trace the source of any responses sent by email. Those schools which did not wish to be identified sent a hard copy of their response through the Council's internal mail system to the LEA.

### 3.4.3 The reporting stage

#### 3.4.3.1 Misuse of research

It is important that relationships between the various stakeholders involved in Liverpool's Inclusion strategy are not adversely affected in any way by the research being undertaken. Every effort, therefore, was taken to ensure that the data was interpreted and analysed in a constructive manner.

# 4. Research Findings

## 4.1 Introduction

The research findings are presented in three sections which correspond to each of the key stakeholder groups identified at the beginning of the project. The first section presents the findings from the questionnaire sent to all Liverpool schools. The most common themes have been extracted together with some suggestions that schools have made for the Authority to consider in the future.

The second section presents the findings from the children and young people who were consulted. These are sub-divided into the information collected from the six school councils, the Youth Council and the School Parliament.

The third section focuses on the views of parents from the Liverpool Parent and Carer Forum towards Inclusion in general and Liverpool's strategy in particular.

Fourthly, the individual case study conducted with a Liverpool parent is presented. The parent concerned has three children, two of whom are in mainstream education and one who attends a special school having previously been in mainstream.

## 4.2 Schools

43 schools in total responded to the questionnaire. This represents 23.9% of the total number of Liverpool schools surveyed. The breakdown of respondents can be seen below:

| School Category | Total number of schools by category | No. of Responses | % of Responses |
|---|---|---|---|
| Primary | 139 | 32 | 23% |
| Secondary | 32 | 9 | 28% |
| Special | 14 | 2 | 14% |

***Table 1: Number of Responses to Liverpool Schools' Questionnaire***

As described earlier, the views of schools were sought via a questionnaire (appendix 1). The first question aimed to establish whether or not schools understood the Council's Inclusion Strategy. The results were as follows:

**Yes** 39 **No** 4

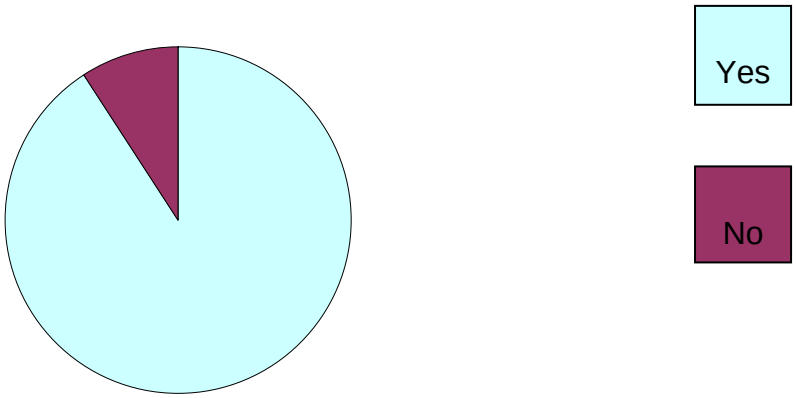


***Fig.6: % of Yes and No Answers from Liverpool Schools***

The second question was designed to give schools the opportunity to comment on how the authority's Inclusion strategy has affected their individual school. Some key themes emerged from this which can be seen below.

| **LIVERPOOL INCLUSION AUDIT** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
| | **PRIMARY** | **SECONDARY** | **SPECIAL** | ***TOTAL*** |
| RETURNS | 32 | 9 | 2 | **43** |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| **Common Themes** | | | | |
| | | | | |
| Need for specialist training | 17 | 6 | 1 | |
| Funding implications including capital costs | 12 | 5 | | |
| Effects of increased workload, paperwork, bureaucracy, time required for meetings etc. | 9 | 3 | | |
| Cannot adequately meet the needs of all SEN pupils | 5 | 3 | | |
| Outreach/specialist support required | 11 | 4 | 2 | |
| Importance of Learning Support Assistants to support inclusion | 8 | 2 | | |
| Challenges of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties | 12 | 3 | | |
| Positive effects of Inclusion | 7 | 1 | | |

***Table 2: Responses from Liverpool Schools to Inclusion Questionnaire***

### 4.3 Children and Young People

#### 4.3.1 School Councils

Seven school councils were invited to take part in the research project; two secondary; two primary and three special schools. One of the secondary schools did not return any information so the results were taken from the remaining six schools. The same questions were put to all schools involved (appendix 2).

Question 1

**Do you think that all children with SEN/disability should go to their local school instead of a special school?**

This question elicited a variety of responses from the children and young people (see tables 3-8). In special school 1, 20 children took part in the exercise and they split up into smaller groups, facilitated by the school's learning mentor and support staff. At the end of the session, they all came together and a vote was cast to ascertain whether the children would prefer to stay in a special school to try mainstream education. The results were as follows:

16 pupils voted to remain in a special school
8 pupils indicated they would like to try mainstream education
3 pupils said they wished to go and see a mainstream school without support from teachers

In special school 2, the vast majority of comments were very positive about being in a special school and negative towards mainstream education.

In special school 3, the children were very much in favour of remaining in a special school and did not express any desire to attend a mainstream school.

In mainstream primary school 1, 11 of the 14 children consulted in the School Council believed children with SEN/disability should attend their local mainstream school rather than a special school. 3 out of the 5 children who

are in special needs classes in the school expressed a desire to attend their local mainstream school. Children in both the special needs and mainstream classes generally felt there should be more mixed classes.

In mainstream school 2, children felt that it should be up to the pupils themselves to decide whether they wanted to attend a special school or not.

In mainstream school 3, children considered the benefits of attending both special and mainstream schools. They also gave a number of suggestions to improve the current arrangements and provision for pupils with SEN.

### 4.3.2 Youth Council

The young people from the Youth Council who took part numbered 11 in total, 4 males and 7 females with 3 describing themselves as having SEN. Their age range was 13-19. Their responses are varied and reflect the wide spectrum of views on the subject of inclusion (table 9).

### 4.3.3 School Parliament

The Liverpool Schools' Parliament was inaugurated in 2001 and, during that first year, 27 schools participated. It now has 90 schools involved, primary, secondary and special with over 200 young people. Meetings take place each half term in the Council chamber at Liverpool Town Hall and the young people produce the agendas for the meetings.

At their meeting on 4th May, 2006, approximately 90 pupils attended from a range of schools across the City. They were each given a questionnaire to complete (appendix 4) although some pupils chose to respond as a small group. 32 questionnaires in total were completed. In response to the first question of whether children with SEN/disability should attend their local mainstream school or a special school, the results were as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| 6 responses favoured attendance at a local mainstream school | 22% |
| 10 responses favoured attendance at a special school | 22% |
| 16 responses considered it a matter of choice for parents and pupils | 50% |

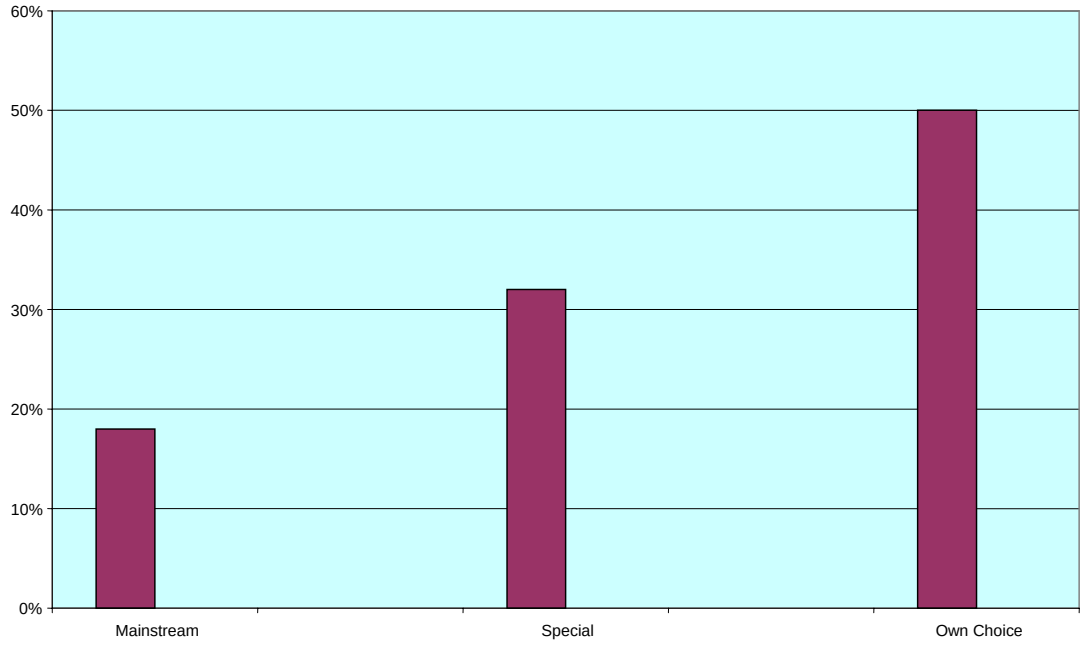


***Fig.7: Views of Liverpool Schools' Parliament on where pupils with SEN should attend school***

Question 2

**What should Liverpool City Council do to make sure that children with Special Educational Needs/Disability have the same opportunities at school as other children?**

This question also elicited a variety of responses from the children and young people (see tables 3-10). Some of the answers given have not been recorded as they were not relevant to the question asked. However, the vast majority of responses have been listed using the young people's actual words.

### 4.4 Parents and Carers – Liverpool Parent and Carer Forum

The results to the Parent and Carer Forum questionnaire can be seen at table 11).

### 4.5 Case Study

The results of the case study can be seen on page 55.

**Table 3: Special School 1 (secondary age)**

## Question 1

**Do you think that all children with special educational needs/disability should go to their local school instead of a special school?**

- I think it's a good idea
- Good to be with other children
- I'm frightened of being left out
- Better the way it is now
- We want to stay in a special school because we get more help but we would like to see what it would be like to a mainstream school
- I would like to see what it is like in mainstream and if I can do the work they do
- Some should and some shouldn't – only kids that are good at reading and writing
- Every child should be asked
- There should be one big school for special needs kids
- We should stay here where we feel happy, comfortable and safe
- Mainstream schools might bully us but when we are in a special school we are all the same so no one bullies us for things we find hard
- I would feel scared and unhappy
- I wouldn't be able to do the work
- Pupils who could do the work in a mainstream school should be able to go a few days a week
- Some kids in mainstream might be nice but most are not
- Our teachers and helpers don't shout at us but mainstream teachers might
- I wouldn't want to go to mainstream like my sister – it would make me nervous and the work would be too hard
- I like this school and I work better here
- I used to find the work hard in my old school
- Mainstream would give you more choice at college courses
- Some of us will get bullied because of our looks, how we talk and our special needs. There are some of us who are difficult to understand and we need our friends
- There might be better work experience available at a mainstream school
- Special schools are just as good at getting good exam results as a mainstream school
- We would fail in mainstream
- We would be left at the back of the class not getting help because the teacher wouldn't have time
- Mainstream schools would do more exams
- Teachers in mainstream schools wouldn't have the time to spend with us in small groups 1:1 for revision
- When we leave special school after year 12, our teachers make sure we have somewhere to go like college or courses. In mainstream, they just let you leave even if you have nothing to do
- When you leave school we are allowed to come back and see staff to show them what we do. We wouldn't do that in mainstream
- We wouldn't cope with the work or exams in mainstream – they would be too hard and we wouldn't get good exam results and we wouldn't get a job

**Question 2**

**What should Liverpool City Council do to make sure that children with special educational needs/disability have the same opportunities at school as other children?**

- Go to college and have support there
- I would like to be independent
- We would like more facilities e.g. swimming pool situated on site and children who can be trusted to be allowed outside at lunch time should do so to improve independence
- Longer time given to work experiences (6 weeks) with the opportunity of more choice of employer e.g. 2 weeks hairdressing, 2 weeks retail, 2 weeks child care nurse
- Continuation of support with further studies at college
- More youth clubs
- Free admittance to leisure centres

**Table 4: Special School 2 (all age)**

**Question 1**

**Do you think that all children with special educational needs/disability should go to their local school instead of a special school?**

- I don't feel comfortable with the idea
- You just can't close all special schools
- People with autism it would take them too long to get used to it, if they are not in a small environment they would just collapse
- I like going to college
- Think it's a bad idea
- I want to stay in own school
- Children in mainstream would make fun, they have a bad reputation on behaviour
- I don't think it would make them more tolerant
- I disagree I like schools the way they are
- It would take them a long time to get used to it
- I would not like to go to local school I used to go there and didn't like it
- I don't mind getting mini-bus to school
- I enjoy going to College for 2 days a week
- I like this school especially science and chemistry. I want to learn how to make robots when I leave

**Question 2**

**What should Liverpool City Council do to make sure that children with special educational needs/disability have the same opportunities at school as other children?**

- Could encourage work experience, I went to WH Smiths it was shaky at start because no one spoke to me but after a few days they were alright
- I have not had any work experience they could not find me a placement, I would like to work in a music shop HMV or Virgin
- I think you should get paid for work experience

- When I am older I want to go to College
- We don't get the chance to do GCSE's all we do is entry level, I think we should have the chance to do exams
- More opportunities to go to College
- More youth clubs there is nowhere to go I used to go to Quiggins in town but they have shut it down
- I think they should have more sports facilities, like a skating rink and 10 pin bowling

**Table 5: Special School 3 (secondary age)**

**Question 1**

**Do you think that all children with special educational needs/disability should go to their local school instead of a special school?**

- No, the kids will get bullied
- No, special needs pupils need special teaches who understand
- No, it's a bit unfair because some kids need extra help than others

**Question 2**

**What should Liverpool City Council do to make sure that children with special educational needs/disability have the same opportunities at school as other children?**

- Keep special schools
- Keep special school open
- Open a sixth form and keep the schools open

**Table 6: Mainstream School 1 (primary with special needs classes)**

**Question 1**

**Do you think that all children with special educational needs/disability should go to their local school instead of a special school?**

- In our school council 11/14 children would like children with SEN/ disability to go to local schools
- 3/5 children, who are in special needs classes in our school would like to go to a school by their own house. Both children in special needs and mainstream classes in this school would like to have more mixed classes

**Question 2**

**What should Liverpool City Council do to make sure that children with special educational needs/disability have the same opportunities at school as other children?**

- Make them all accessible (more ramps & lifts in schools)
- Have transport provided, have more resources.

- More Braille & touchy things.
- More teachers and helpers with special training

**Table 7: Mainstream School 2 (Primary school merged with a special school for pupils with physical disabilities)**

**Question 1**

**Do you think that all children with special educational needs/disability should go to their local school instead of a special school?**

- If they want to, but at our school we have lots of disabled children

**Question 2**

**What should Liverpool City Council do to make sure that children with special educational needs/disability have the same opportunities at school as other children?**

- They should give more money to schools
- They could make sure schools have the right equipment and enough games for all children to play at playtime

**Table 8: Mainstream School 3 (Secondary school with resourced provision for pupils with hearing impairment and physical disability)**

**Question 1**

**Do you think that all children with special educational needs/disability should go to their local school instead of a special school?**

This question brought a mixed response. Some pupils feel that it is right that all children have access to their local school, whereas there was also the feeling that some children could be better catered for in a special school environment.

Reasons for going to Local School

- Pupils will feel wanted in their own community
- Pupils should be allowed to go to any school
- Pupils shouldn't be separated just because they may have a disability
- Disabled pupils shouldn't be treated differently
- It's their entitlement

Reasons for going to special school

- Disabled pupils' own safety can sometimes be an issue
- It may be easier to mix with pupils in a similar situation
- There may be better facilities
- The staff may be better trained in a special school to work with children with particular disabilities

Comment was made that pupils with behavioural problems may be catered for better in a special school because of the impact that their behaviour has on those who are learning

**Question 2**

**What should Liverpool City Council do to make sure that children with special educational needs/disability have the same opportunities at school as other children?**

- Give schools more money for equipment and staff/carers
- Provide better facilities
- More lifts and ramps
- Build a massive special school so that disabled children get the best opportunities available to them
- Attach special schools to mainstream schools

**Table 9: Youth Council**

**Question 1**

**Do you think that all children with special educational needs/disability should go to their local school instead of a special school?**

- Should have the option
- Depends on individual needs
- Bullying can lead to suicide
- Not mainstream means less bullying
- People with physical disabilities fit into mainstream schools easier that people with mental disabilities
- More prefects in school
- People with talking disorders should have facilities to help them

**Question 2**

**What should Liverpool City Council do to make sure that children with special educational needs/disability have the same opportunities at school as other children?**

- Smaller classes in general
- Lifts
- ADHD – more education on such problems
- Special classes as potentially could bring down the rest of the class
- Classroom assistants
- Get out of school 5 minutes earlier
- Ramps
- Disabled toilets
- Mentors
- Freedom (own space)
- More activities that include everyone

**Table 10: Liverpool Schools' Parliament**

**Question 1**

**Do you think that all children with special educational needs/disability should go to their local school instead of a special school?**

Mainstream

- They should go to a local school so they can have a pastoral carer and learn things that other children learn
- They should go to a local school so they can learn to have a normal life at school and so they can meet other school children
- I think they should go to local schools because they are no different and should be treated the same
- I don't think children with SEN should be segregated. Social and emotional development relies on interaction with a whole variety of children
- They should go to their local school as it would make others realise they are no different just because they have a special need or disability
- Local school because they can meet people that do not have disabilities

Special

- They should go to special schools because schools might not have facilities or properly trained staff
- I think that a mainstream school cannot offer the educational support that children with SEN require
- I don't think children with SEN should go to their local school because they may find it hard to cope with the speed or ability of the class and not get the attention they need. They may also be subject to bullying by other children.
- I think it is more beneficial for children with SEN to go to a special school because they will then receive all the help they need. If they go to their local school, they may be subject to prejudice and discrimination and will not receive the full help they need
- I think they should go to a special school because there are more people to play with
- I think they should go to a special school because there are more people who care
- I think that children with SEN should go to special schools because they are around people that are the same as them
- They should attend special school because people could hurt their feelings or skit them. Disabled people should have a friend by their side
- Children with SEN should not go to local schools because the children might not agree and the teachers in the special schools might be out of a job
- They should not go to a local school because it might have an effect on other pupils. Also, schools may need extra funding

Choice

- It depends on the disability/ability. Parental choice is as important for disabled students as others. Mainstream schools need to be fully prepared for access, physically, socially and emotionally
- All children with SEN/disability should have the option to go to either their local school or a special school. It should be their own decision
- It depends on the actual person and what suits them. Everyone is different
- I think each family should have the choice. However, not all local schools have the appropriate facilities, e.g. mentors, extra help, so it isn't really fair to say that local schools could give the same support
- They should have the choice but not all schools have the staff or facilities
- We think they should go to special school if they are really bad but if they are not that bad, they should go to normal school
- There should be choice

- I don't think they should be made to go anywhere. It should be their choice. They would get more attention in special schools but it would help them to socialise in local schools
- It should be down to choice for parents and the child. They may not wish to go to mainstream school
- They can learn more and get more attention in special school but should be able to socialise with other people and give other children a chance to socialise with disabled children. I think local schools should have a 'special' area
- I think they should go to both types of school so they get the best of both
- Not all SEN pupils should be made to attend a local school but should be given the option of going either to a special needs school or to a local school
- I think they should be able to go to both
- I think children with disabilities should be able to choose where they go
- I think half the week they should go to a special school and the other half to normal school

**Question 2**

**What should Liverpool City Council do to make sure that children with special educational needs/disability have the same opportunities at school as other children?**

- More pastoral care and specially trained teachers in mainstream
- Provide equipment and specialist facilities
- Ensure pupils are taught as a whole
- Educate other pupils in SEN/disability to prevent bullying
- Encourage pupils with SEN/disability to get involved in extra-curricular activities with other pupils
- Have dual placements in mainstream and special schools
- Councillors should spend time in special schools to raise awareness of the needs of the students as many cannot articulate for themselves in conventional ways
- Be more interactive with children with SEN
- After school clubs
- Mentors in schools
- Buddy systems
- Websites with advice, problem pages etc.
- Separate booster classes/homework clubs after school
- Ensure that transport and buildings are accessible
- Children in special schools have more opportunities than those in mainstream
- Do not close the special schools
- Give additional funding to the schools that take pupils with SEN
- Visit the schools regularly
- Give parents of pupils with SEN full information about the different types of schools their children could attend

**Table 11: Liverpool Parent and Carer Forum**

**Question 1**

**What do you understand by the term Inclusion?**

- I used to think Inclusion was about making all children fit – now think we need to consider the child first and the system should change to meet his/her needs so that every child feels valued and included
- Inclusion is also about including parents – they need to be supported and given strategies to help their children in school holidays
- Inclusion can only be facilitated if individual needs are recognised (e.g. transport)
- Inclusion is where the child is most happy and secure and where he/she can thrive
- Inclusion is more than just education – it relates to all aspects of life, e.g. going to the cinema, swimming baths, toilets etc.
- Inclusion to me means my child feeling safe, happy and secure
- Inclusion is being involved in the place you are (wherever that is). Inclusion can take place in a special school
- Inclusion is feeling safe, having the opportunity to be involved in all activities
- Inclusion is about awareness, understanding, empathy, appreciation and acceptance of difference. It means valuing all aspects of the child, not just academic ability

**Question 2**

**Do you feel you have any influence over Liverpool's Inclusion Strategy? (Please explain)**

- Feel there has been a big change. The local authority now seems to be committed to consulting with parents
- We don't want local authority officers just to be pleasant but to take us seriously and take action as a result
- If the local authority is serious about consulting with stakeholders, they should value parents by paying us
- Foster parents aren't consulted – that is wrong
- Local authority officers need first hand experience of what it is like looking after a child with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Absolutely not!
- We have said for the past two years about how to manage the special school closures but there is no evidence to show they have listened
- Until this morning, I have always felt that I wasn't listened to so I now have some hope
- I do not feel as a parent that I have any influence over Liverpool's Inclusion Strategy whatsoever
- I feel we have some influence with certain officers and councillors but not with others
- I feel positive at the moment with Liverpool because it feels as though some barriers have been broken down with Council officers coming to the Parent/Carer Forum and talking in an informal manner
- It is still confrontational – some officers and councillors still make insensitive comments
- We are given simple statements to explain policy with no detail and the Council doesn't engage us at a sufficiently early stage of the process
- Parent reps used to attend the Education Select Committee meetings but now they have to submit written questions beforehand
- There should be a variety of methods used to engage parents including:
    - public meetings
    - small meetings held at different times and in different locations

- more information from schools
- a summary of information to go to all parents with the opportunity to access more in-depth information if required
- sufficient time should be given to enable parents to respond to consultations. Sometimes they are given less than a week
- some parents have special educational needs themselves and this needs to be taken into account

**Question 3**

**What issues would you like the Council to think about when they are transferring resources and pupils from special to mainstream schools?**

- Every child is an individual with individual needs
- The process should be slow – do one school at a time and do it properly
- There is a major issue about prior training for mainstream school staff – if the Council doesn't get this right, it will lead to us wanting home tuition or independent schools
- Staff from special schools should move with the child – should look at a phased transfer and dual placements
- Parents need more support from the Parent Partnership Service during this stressful time
- Children in mainstream schools will need awareness training
- There will be issues with transport – it cannot just be assumed that children will automatically be able to get to a mainstream school
- Resourced schools must be up and running before the special school closes
- What about choice? – the Government agenda is that parents should have more choice
- We should ask the children themselves
- We must see the family as a whole. Families cannot have 3 children in 3 different schools
- I would like the Council and schools to give more consideration to life skills and disability awareness for all children
- The early identification of need and early intervention is very important
- We should be allowed to see how much money is spent on our child – evidence should be made available by schools
- Please think about social and communication disorders, anxieties and the implications of these disorders e.g. mental health problems
- Children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) are the hardest to include. There should still be special schools for these children

### 4.4 Case Study – Mrs. X and her three children

Mrs. X has three children, a girl M aged 9 at the time of writing, a boy P nearly 8 and another boy nearly 6.

The main focus of this case study is P, the boy who showed signs of special educational needs from the age of two. At that time, he attended a private nursery where he displayed some social and behavioural difficulties. Mrs. X moved P to another private nursery where he experienced toileting problems and started self-harming. At age 4, P moved to a local Infants school where he stayed for a few months until a place became available at another local school which was Mrs. X's choice of school. At the first infants school, P experienced difficulties straight away and started to wet himself.

In September of that year, he moved to the new infants school and shortly after, Mrs. X was called into the school when she was told that P had not settled in school very well and his behaviour was poor. Shortly after, he saw the school's Educational Psychologist who mentioned the possibility of P having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) to Mrs. X. Mrs. X applied to the Authority for a statutory assessment of P's special educational needs but was declined and she did not appeal against the decision. Things did not improve very much as P could not sit still and concentrate long enough to learn how to read and write. At this stage, he was being seen by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) but there was still no formal diagnosis of his needs. Eventually, Mrs. X had P assessed privately and was told that P had Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) tendencies, and ADHD. P received no additional support in school and continued to self-harm and scream. The school did not push for additional support from the local authority.

At the end of year 1, a review of P's progress was carried out and Mrs. X requested that he be kept back a year to repeat year 1. This was agreed and P appeared to be doing quite well at first. He received some outreach support from a special school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties who mentioned the possibility of ASD. At this point, Mrs. X applied for statutory assessment again but was declined. Then, things started to go wrong again and it came to light that the school had begun to physically restrain P without the knowledge of Mrs. X. She found out through drawings that P had done for her which showed a picture of a child being held down by two adults. P was too upset to go into school at that time so Mrs. X kept him home. Following this incident, the Headteacher of the school came out to Mrs. X's home and explained why the school had taken the action they had. P returned to school for the last few days of term but from that point on, Mrs. X started to approach other local schools. She contacted the local education authority for advice on how to resolve the situation in the school and eventually found another school which was prepared to accept P. He started attending there during the summer term but had to move straight into year 2 and the first few weeks were difficult as P became stressed and started swearing in school. He then appeared to settle in quite well and at the start of the new academic year, he moved up to the junior school with a new teacher.

Three weeks later, problems began to present themselves again and P would hide under the table and scream. Mrs. X was constantly asked to go into school. The school were very open and honest with her about P's behaviour and a meeting was arranged in the November with a representative from the local authority and an educational psychologist in which the school asked for additional support to help P. Mrs. X was very upset by what the school reported about P. The school had been told by the Authority that they had to provide the support for P and how to go about doing it. A diagnosis of ASD had been received from the Autism Care Pathway following their assessment of P in September but no support was given.

P's school began to suggest to Mrs. X that P needed a new school. They suggested one which Mrs. X visited but was not even built at that time. The school then named another special school which Mrs. X could not view because P did not have a statement. Mrs. X re-applied for a statutory assessment for P and this was agreed by the local authority. P was excluded from school for 3 days in November and following a meeting when he returned to school, the school agreed to support him at playtimes. There was a classroom assistant in school but this was shared between 3 classes so there was no possibility of P receiving much support within the classroom. The statutory assessment was commenced around December and a proposed statement issued in February which read 'access to a support assistant'. During this time, there appeared to a rapid deterioration in P's behaviour and he ceased to communicate properly with his mother and began to act like a dog. The school mentioned to Mrs. X that they thought that a special school may be suitable for P and he began to receive outreach support from this special school. They immediately identified and understood his difficulties and gave advice to the mainstream school about how to meet his needs. There was a small improvement at this point. Mrs. X had been supporting P herself in school nearly every day for part of the day but when the outreach support from the special school commenced, she had to cease to support him as she was advised that this was not in his best interests.

Mrs. X was advised by the school that she had to accompany P on school trips, otherwise he would not be able to attend. She was able to do this on three occasions but on the fourth occasion, she was unable to do so and the school advised her that P would not therefore be able to go. Mrs. X contacted the local authority for advice and the school eventually found someone to support P on the school trip.

Mrs. X made enquiries at the junior school where her daughter attends for a place for P and is the junior school P would have attended had he not left the infant feeder school. However, there was building work being undertaken at the school and there were no quiet places for the pupils to go. Also, the junior school had the same governors as the infant school and Mrs. X thought this may colour the school's judgement of P. Mrs. X went to view the special school which had been providing outreach support for P at his mainstream school. She was favourably impressed and thought it was very homely and comfortable. P had withdrawn from all areas by this time and would not talk at all which indicated to Mrs. X that he was not happy. She asked the local

authority if P could view the special school and they said yes. P had a look round and seemed to like it. Mrs. X was told that she may have to wait for a place as the school was over-subscribed but he was given a place and started this year just after Easter. His behaviour has been very challenging at home since he started at the new school and Mrs. X is hoping that this will improve once P has settled in.

M, the girl, attends a mainstream primary school in Liverpool. She has dyslexia and hyper-mobility of her joints. She does not have a statement of special educational need but has seen the Educational Psychologist and receives some small group support within school. Her progress is reviewed by Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and she appears to be making good progress.

When interviewed, M said she was glad that P had left her school as he bullied her friends. M sometimes got into trouble at school because when P got into a fight, she was often blamed. Other parents started to complain about P's behaviour towards their children. Mrs. X reported that M finds it difficult to relate to P at home and Mrs. X has to work very hard with P and M. M has attended the sibling group to learn about P's difficulties.

D, the other boy, is in the first year at the same local school where P first attended. When in the nursery, D exhibited some of the same behavioural problems as P and Mrs. X was worried that he would be not be treated objectively because of their previous knowledge of P. She therefore asked for him to be given a teacher who had no previous knowledge of either boy and this was agreed. Although it is thought that D has dyslexia, he appears to be doing well at school with no major problems.

In the past, Mrs. X thought of inclusion meaning all children being taught under the same roof but since her experiences with P, she now believes that inclusion is about finding the right environment for a child where he can flourish and be included in activities, irrespective of where that setting is. She is aware of children with SEN who attend mainstream schools and are doing well but they tend to be those children with visible special needs, such as physical disabilities etc. and they tend to attract more sympathy than children who look normal but have hidden difficulties.

Mrs. X is not sure about what the future holds for P. If he is happy at the special school, she would not take the risk of moving him back to mainstream. She is aware that the first infant school P attended has received an award for Inclusion although they did exclude P from a number of activities such as play. She thought the school did well to include a number of different groups of children such as ethnic minority groups, children with SEN being supported by the Special Educational Needs Support Service (SENISS) etc. but that they did not always deal appropriately with P's difficulties. However, she recognises that inclusion is a journey and that all schools need to continue to develop their practice as more and more children with SEN attend mainstream schools.

In terms of his involvement in the community, P first attended a Beavers group which could not cope with him and he now attends a new group where he is supported and where one of the teachers has had training in ASD. P loves going to the group. He also started a swimming club but they too could not cope with his difficulties and he now attends a different group where he is doing well. He attends a horse riding club at weekends which caters for all children. Mrs. X's neighbours are very good with P, although she is not happy about him playing out on his own and takes the children to the local park instead.

In terms of Liverpool's Inclusion strategy, Mrs. X believes that the authority is trying to move too fast and that they should not try and close a number of special schools at the same time, but should do it in a planned and phased way. She also thinks that when children are moved from special schools to mainstream schools, there needs to be a long planning process in order to ensure success with each individual child, each with an amount of funding. She believes that some children will never cope in mainstream so there will always be the need for some special schools to remain open. She foresees an increase over the next 5-10 years of parents teaching their children at home. If this is the case, the local authority should be putting aside funding for this purpose to make sure that those children receive the best education as approximately half of those children will have SEN. Mrs. X worries that, in the bigger picture, there will be more and more young adults ending up in prison because their needs are not met.

# 5. Conclusions and Implications

## 5.1 Introduction

The evidence from the literature and previous research has indicated that there are benefits to an organisation, whether public or private, in considering and applying the principles of stakeholder theory to its activities. In terms of educational inclusion, it is clear that there is a wide disparity between the views of stakeholders on whether children with SEN should attend mainstream or special schools. Even amongst each stakeholder group, there are huge discrepancies between the various viewpoints. In addition, local authorities have to operate within a framework set by central Government which exerts pressure on local policies and is subject to political influence.

Given that the involvement of stakeholders in the development of policy is still a relatively new phenomenon, the research question of whether Liverpool Education Authority is likely to succeed in the implementation of its Inclusion strategy appeared to be both timely and appropriate. As a result of the adopted methodology, the following conclusions and implications have been made about the research question and its related research objectives.

## 5.2 Critical Evaluation of Adopted Methodology

The research methodology employed a multi-method strategy, combining semi-structured interviews, survey, face to face discussions and case study techniques. The two main advantages for using this style of approach were firstly, it enabled different methods to be used for different purposes in the study, e.g. the semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to get a feel for the key issues before embarking on the questionnaires. Secondly, the use of multi-methods enabled triangulation to take place whereby the use of different data collection methods within one study ensured that the information provided by the data was correct (Saunders et al, 2003). Each method or technique employed in the research had its own unique strengths and weaknesses (Smith, 1975) and, inevitably, the data collection method chosen affected the results obtained.

As an employee of the organisation concerned, the researcher adopted the role of the practitioner-researcher. This eliminated one of the most difficult hurdles that the participant-observer has to overcome, namely that of negotiating research access. Another advantage was the researcher's knowledge of the organisation and all that implied about understanding the complexity of the organisation, its processes and structures. The disadvantage of this was that the researcher, as a senior officer within the organisation, albeit seconded, probably shared most of the assumptions and preconceptions that form the basis of the organisation's culture and ethos. This may have prevented the exploration of issues that could have enriched the research further.

These issues were more pertinent to the qualitative aspects of the research, but the use of questionnaires to form the basis of the discussion with parents/carers and children/young people largely minimised this problem. However, the fact that the discussions with the children and young people were led by the staff from the schools may have transferred the issue of familiarity to a third party in that some of the answers given would suggest the presence of a certain influence or bias.

There were some problems experienced in the data collection of the questionnaire to schools. It was decided that this be conducted electronically via the City Council's internal email system using a new facility. Some initial teething problems resulted in a small number (around 8) questionnaires being lost in the system which could not be retrieved and were therefore not included in the results.

Originally, it was thought that three case studies would be conducted in order to represent the three main schools of thought within the Inclusion debate, i.e. one which focused on the benefits of attendance in mainstream schools for pupils with SEN, one which explored the benefits of special school education and the third which involved a mixture of the two. Because the choice of the case study families relied on them volunteering to take part, coupled with restrictions on the researcher's time, only one was eventually used. The use of the case study enabled the researcher to gain a rich understanding of the

context of the research and the processes being enacted (Morris and Wood, 1991). One disadvantage, however, with this method was that it exposed the researcher's design to the influence and interruptions arising from day-to-day events to a somewhat greater extent that with other methods (Jankowicz, 2002). There was also the perceived imposition on the researcher's part on a family's personal life and the unforeseen emotional effect that sharing their experiences would have on the family.

## 5.3 Conclusions about the Research Question

What are the views of Liverpool Education Authority's Principal Stakeholders in relation to its Inclusion Strategy for children with SEN?

### 5.3.1 Schools

The vast majority (over 90%) of schools which took part in the survey claimed to understand the Council's Inclusion strategy. This would suggest that the local authority has been largely successful in ensuring that schools as primary stakeholders (Caroll, 1989 & Clarkson, 1995) have been kept informed as to the Authority's inclusion strategy.

Given the administrative burden currently placed on schools, the fact that almost half of Liverpool schools responded to the questionnaire would suggest that inclusion is an important issue for them. This may mean that the work the local authority has done to raise the level of interest and involvement of schools in the inclusion debate may have resulted in their transfer to segment D of the Stakeholder Power/Interest matrix (Mendelow, 1991). This would mean that their levels of interest and power would both be high and that through a process of education/communication, they have repositioned themselves to become key players (Johnson & Scholes, 2001).

The responses from schools as to how the Authority's Inclusion strategy has affected their individual school reflects many of the issues raised by current literature and research. The highest priority listed in the responses from schools (55%) was that of the need for specialist training. This has been highlighted by many bodies and organisations, including the Audit

Commission in their report SEN - a mainstream issue, 2002, one of the key findings of which was that 'many teachers feel ill-equipped to meet the needs of pupils with SEN'. This also concurs with the examples cited in Pearpoint & Forest's (2005a) article from teachers, in particular the quote 'I haven't been trained to take care of those!' and with Blandford's (2004) article where she describes how Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) in schools are rarely trained, either as experts in SEN or as managers.

The second theme which emerged from the schools' questionnaire was that of funding (39%). This finding reflects the concerns of teachers (Pearpoint & Forest, 2005a) and reiterates the views expressed in the Audit Commission's report SEN – a mainstream issue (2002) by a headteacher who stated:

'I am all for inclusion but when a child arrives with high levels of need, my heart sinks because we don't have the resources to support them'. Given the levels of social deprivation in Liverpool (NPF statistics, 2004), it is perhaps not surprising that funding is one of the primary concerns of mainstream schools in the Inclusion debate. 12 primary schools compared to 5 secondary schools considered funding to be a major obstacle to Inclusion which support Ofsted's (2004) findings from their survey of schools which suggested that small primary schools experienced greater financial difficulty in meeting the needs of pupils with SEN than larger schools. However, it does not support the view expressed by CSIE (2002) that it is more a question of attitudes than funding.

The third main theme is that of increased workload, paperwork and bureaucracy in mainstream schools (27%). Sonia Blandford (2004) who described how most Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) in schools spend a large proportion of their time teaching and are also expected to attend meetings and convene meetings with pastoral and academic staff within their school. This is not surprising given that the questionnaire was directed to school SENCOs and it is this group which carries much of the responsibility in schools for developing Inclusion.

The fourth issue to emerge was schools' inability to adequately meet the needs of all SEN pupils (18%). This finding reflects the conclusions of the

Audit Commission (2002) that many mainstream school staff feel inequipped to meet the wide range of pupil needs. It does, however, raise a problem with regard to the views of some parental organisations such as the Alliance for Inclusive Education (ALLFIE) which believes that all children and young people should be educated in a single mainstream system as a basic human right.

The fifth outcome from the survey relates to specialist support or outreach into mainstream schools (39%). This is linked to and will be considered with the sixth outcome of the importance of Learning Support Assistants(LSAs) to support Inclusion. These findings support the Government's proposals as enshrined in its national strategy for SEN: Removing Barriers to Achievement (2004). The Government recognises that the increased delegation of SEN resources by local authorities to schools has eroded the availability of support in some areas and wishes to improve the quality, availability and cost effectiveness of SEN advice and support services. The findings are also reflected nationally by Ofsted (2004) in their recording of the importance of LSAs to the success of Inclusion.

The sixth outcome from the survey relates to the issue of including children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (34%). This is a very sensitive area which has received high profile nationally in recent years. Pearpoint & Forest, 2005b) argue that even those children with severe behavioural problems can and should be included in mainstream schools. However, the findings reflect the national picture reported by Ofsted (2004) where they recognised that pupils with social and behavioural difficulties continued to present obstacles to Inclusion.

The last theme to emerge from the questionnaire was the positive aspects of Inclusion (18%). These were more prevalent in the primary phase than in secondary schools. This finding is supported by numerous examples of effective inclusive practice reported across the country by Ofsted, 2006 and Florian & Rouse, 2001 who found examples of where pupils with SEN participated fully into the school community and that a school's approach to

tackling disability and diversity can have positive effects on whole-school issues such as bullying.

### 5.3.2 Children and Young People

The first question asked to all the children and young people attracted a wide range of views from those who favoured special education for pupils with SEN to those who preferred a mainstream option to those who felt it should be a matter of choice for the individual concerned. There has been very little research conducted on the views of children and young people towards inclusion which is probably because the importance of securing the engagement of young people in decisions about their education is still a relatively new phenomenon. However, the findings largely reflect Government policy as enshrined in Removing Barriers to Achievement (2004) which promotes the importance of involving children with SEN in decisions about their own learning and enabling them to communicate their views on the choices facing them.

The fact that the research involved consulting individual school councils, the Youth Council and the Schools' Parliament would suggest that there are structures in place in Liverpool to enable children and young people to have their voice heard. This supports the Government's principles for partnership as set out in Learning to Listen (2001) and the work of Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin and Sinclair (2003) which posits a rationale for involving children and young people in decision-making. However, whilst the views of young people are being sought in a variety of ways, there is little evidence of the impact or outcomes of their involvement (Partridge, 2005) and on the quality of participation (Kirby & Bryson, 2002).

The second question asked to all the children and young people who were consulted also raised a wide variety of themes, many of which reflect the issues raised both in Central Government policies and guidance as well as current literature. Some key examples of this are as follows:

- Many of the children's responses referred to aspects of their lives outside their attendance at school. They wanted to be able to take part in after-school activities such as swimming, youth clubs, sports and leisure facilities and have access to buddy systems, websites with advice and support, homework classes, accessible transport and buildings. All of these factors reflect the principles underpinning 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children', 2004 which is a shared programme of change to improve outcomes for all children and young people in the five key areas of: being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution, and achieving economic well-being.

- Many of the children consulted expressed fears and concerns about attending mainstream schools, either based on their experience of attending a mainstream school or on their own perceptions. They referred to being scared, unhappy, worried about bullying, unable to do the work, standing out from their peers, etc. These views reflect the findings of Ofsted (2004), namely that enabling pupils with SEN to participate fully in the life of the school and achieve their potential remains a significant challenge for many schools and those of the Audit Commission (2002) which found that some children with SEN were regularly excluded from certain lessons and extra-curricular activities and most children who are permanently excluded from school have SEN.

### 5.3.3 Parents and Carers

The first question asked of parents and carers: What do you understand by the term Inclusion? prompted a number of interesting findings. Firstly, they reiterated much of the sentiments expressed by the children and young people in that they viewed Inclusion as something which affected the child's whole life, not just education and also that of their family. This again reflects the principles espoused in Every Child Matters (2004) in which the Government identifies the need to build local services around the needs of children and their families.

The second question focused on whether parents felt they had any influence over Liverpool's Inclusion strategy. Responses to this question varied greatly and some parents felt that they had absolutely no influence at all. However, there were some positive comments regarding aspects of Liverpool's engagement with parents which suggest that they have begun to address the need to involve parents in line with Government expectations (Every Child Matters, 2004) and (SEN Code of Practice, 2001).

The third question focused on which issues parents and carers wanted the City Council to take into account during the implementation of its Inclusion strategy. The need for training for mainstream school staff and pupils was identified as a key issue which supports the views expressed by schools discussed earlier and the findings of the Audit Commission (2002), Blandford (2004) and Pearpoint & Forest (2005a).

Parents also identified the need for increased support from parent partnership services during the implementation stage of the Inclusion strategy. This finding concurs with the Government's recognition of the value of parent partnership services and its desire to consider the scope for enhancing their impact (Removing Barriers to Achievement, 2004).

Early identification of need and early intervention were seen by parents as being critical to the success of the Inclusion strategy. This mirrors the Government's recognition of the importance of this (Removing Barriers to Achievement, 2004) and (Every Child Matters, 2004).

Parents wanted more information about a number of issues including the choice of schools available to them and the financial aspects of their child's support package. As schools receive greater autonomy and responsibility for managing their own finances (The Education and Inspections Bill, 2006), it will increasingly fall to schools to provide parents with this type of information whilst the local authority adopts more of a monitoring and strategic function (Ainscow & Tweddle, 2001).

In terms of pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD), parents felt that these children were the hardest to include in mainstream education and that special schools would still be required for this group of young people. This echoes Ofsted's (2004) findings, but does not support Pearpoint & Forest's (2005b) views that these pupils can and should be included in mainstream schools.

### 5.3.4 Case Study

The case study of Mrs. X and her three children reveals some interesting points.

First, the main subject of the study experienced difficulties at nursery school from the age of two. The need for early identification and intervention was reiterated by many parents during the study and has been well documented by Central Government (Removing Barriers to Achievement, 2004 and Every Child Matters, 2004.).

The importance of listening to parents is very evident from the case study. Mrs. X was in the best position to advise professionals of her son's difficulties and yet her concerns were not always taken seriously or addressed, which led to frustration and anxiety. The fact that the Government is committed to engaging more closely with parents in the decision-making process (SEN Code of Practice, 2001 and Every Child Matters, 2004) will hopefully mean that the experiences of Mrs. X will not be replicated in the future as local authorities work more closely with parents and carers in the design and delivery of services.

It is clear that P's SEN have affected the whole family including his siblings. This reflects the views expressed by other parents who wanted the local authority to view the family unit as a whole and not address the needs of children with SEN in isolation. This approach is again endorsed by the Government in Every Child Matters, 2004.

Mrs. X's views about inclusion have changed in the light of her experience with her son. She now believes, along with the vast majority of parents involved in the study, that inclusion is about finding the right environment for a child to flourish and be included in all activities, irrespective of where that setting is. This is one of the key messages contained in the House of Commons Education & Skills committee report, 2006).

Finally, Mrs. X urges the local authority to review its inclusion strategy and ensure that any changes are brought about in a planned, phased way. She believes that there will always be a need for some special schools to remain open. Again, this view largely concurs with that of the other parents consulted and is endorsed by the findings of the Education and Skills Committee report, 2006.

All of the findings discussed above must lead us to consider the second part of the research question, namely whether Liverpool LEA is likely to succeed in the implementation of its Inclusion strategy. Success in this context cannot merely be judged by the number of special schools that have already been closed but by whether the children who are now attending mainstream schools who may have attended special schools in the past are fully included in the life of the school and local community and whether they are able to reach their full potential. These factors are, of course, qualitatively much more difficult to measure but the views of the three principal stakeholder groups can give the Council a basis upon which to explore this issue further. There are, clearly, a number of positive areas which have been reported by schools, children and young people and parents and carers in which the local authority has made progress, but there remain some significant challenges which it must take account of in order to be able to claim that the Inclusion strategy has been a success.

Given the wide ranging spectrum of views on the subject of Inclusion, we may be forced to accept Sternberg's (1997) perspective that balancing stakeholder benefits is an unworkable objective and that the value of stakeholder theory is limited in this regard. The findings would certainly support the view that it would be very difficult to balance the needs of all Liverpool's principal

stakeholders in the implementation of its Inclusion strategy. If the power of local authorities continues to diminish, this may, of course, be academic and the provision of local services would be dictated more by market forces where stakeholders would play an increasingly powerful role. However, whilst local authorities are still responsible for planning and providing services to parents, children and schools for pupils with SEN, we must continue to work with partners in trying to achieve the best possible outcomes for children.

### 5.4 Limitations of the Study

Because of the nature of the subject, the research findings cannot easily be generalised to represent the views of all schools, children and young people and parents and carers in Liverpool. As every child and family's needs are individual, no study could, in fact, claim to truly reflect the full picture.

The Liverpool Parent and Carer Forum is a relatively small group of parents, the majority of whom are not in favour of the closure of special schools. There are, however, significant numbers of parents in the city who support the principle of mainstream education as a basic human right and do not consider segregated provision to be a viable option for their children.

### 5.5 Opportunities for Further Research

The opportunities for further research relevant to this study would include expanding the study to embrace a wider cross-section of schools, children and parents. A further opportunity, as mentioned in the recommendations section, would involve research, for example, into the impact of a school placement on a child's educational achievement, social development and future life prospects and would enable the local authority to evaluate the impact of its policies on the lives of children.

### 5.6 Summary

The research questions have been answered in that the views of all the principal stakeholders in Liverpool's Inclusion strategy have been sought as to what is working, and the remaining challenges. These findings enabled the

researcher to evaluate the likely success of the strategy, taking into account the external influences at work.

There have been some positive aspects to Liverpool's inclusion strategy for each of its stakeholder groups but there are significant issues which need to be addressed in order that its future success is assured. Inclusion is a journey which will involve the local authority in continuously reviewing and evaluating its policies in respect of pupils with SEN and even if all of planned closures of special schools were realised, the Inclusion strategy could still not be deemed to have been achieved until the mechanisms are in place to enable all children and young people to flourish at school, whatever setting they are in and to fulfil their potential.

## 6. Recommendations

Now that Liverpool City Council is approximately half way through the implementation of its Inclusion strategy, the following actions are recommended in order that the lessons learned thus far can inform future practice.

**Communication**

- Establish a communications strategy to ensure that the three principal stakeholder groups are kept informed about the progress and implementation of the Inclusion strategy. This should include approaches that are appropriate to each of the stakeholder groups. For example, all schools should receive updated bulletins about their legal and other responsibilities in relation to Inclusion and how Liverpool's strategy will affect them both collectively and individually. Children and young people should be given every opportunity to engage with the local authority on how the strategy affects them directly and express their views about what is planned for them. All children should be consulted, even those without SEN. Parents and carers should be given clear, concise information about the Inclusion strategy in summary form on a regular basis with the opportunity to access more detailed information if they wish. They should also be invited to public meetings where the issues can be discussed at convenient times and locations. Those who are directly affected by the changes should be given sufficient time to consider proposals and the support of parent partnership services or other staff to guide them through their individual situation.

**Evaluation of Impact of Inclusion Strategy**

- The local authority should consider conducting some research into the effects of the Inclusion strategy on the outcomes of the children affected thus far, involving all principal stakeholders, and taking into account the social implications as well as educational outcomes. This

should be a continuous process throughout the implementation phase in order that lessons learned can be acted upon. It should also consider replicating Smart's (2000) research into methods of supporting attitude change amongst children within existing frameworks of mainstream and special education.

**Review of Inclusion Strategy**

- The local authority should review its overall strategy in the light of the recently published House of Commons Education & Skills Committee Report: Special Educational Needs, 2006). The report calls for clarification of the Government's position on inclusion to avoid confusion on the part of local authorities in determining their policies. If, as it would appear, the Government is no longer looking for continued closures of special schools as previously indicated in its 2004 SEN Strategy Removing Barriers to Achievement, then Liverpool may wish to rethink its plans to close the majority of its special schools by 2014.

**Review of Funding for Inclusion**

- In the light of the above, there could potentially be important implications for the development of inclusion in mainstream schools if Liverpool's strategy were dependent on the closure of its special schools to release the necessary funding to invest in the mainstream sector. The local authority should ensure that its financial plans are transparent in this regard and communicated to all its key stakeholders.

**Establish a Comprehensive Training Strategy for school based staff in all areas of SEN**

- Training in SEN has emerged as being one of they key priorities for all of the principal stakeholders involved in this research. Although there has been training available to mainstream schools for some time, the research would suggest that this is inadequate and that there needs to be a radical improvement in SEN and disability training in initial teacher

training, induction and in the continuing professional development of all staff (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee report, 2006). Clearly, this will not be the sole responsibility of the local authority but it will require strategic planning on its part to ensure that effective training is provided to schools and evaluated. Training for parents and pupils should also be included in the training strategy.

**Establish closer collaborative working practices between special and mainstream schools**

- The local authority should seek to facilitate closer collaboration between its special and mainstream schools in order that they can share resources and specialist knowledge. More flexibility in the use of dual placements should be considered as part of this agenda so that parents and children have real choices as to how their needs are met.

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## APPENDICES

**Appendix 1**: Liverpool Schools' Questionnaire
**Appendix 2**: Liverpool School Councils' Questionnaire
**Appendix 3**: Liverpool Youth Council Questionnaire
**Appendix 4**: Liverpool Schools' Parliament Questionnaire
**Appendix 5**: Flier for Liverpool Parent and Carer Forum event
**Appendix 6**: Liverpool Parent and Carer Forum Questionnaire

The City of Liverpool

## LIVERPOOL'S INCLUSION STRATEGY

Liverpool City Council's Policy on SEN and Inclusion was launched in 2000 and since then, the Council has continued to make changes to its provision for pupils with SEN in line with its Inclusion strategy.

One of the main features of this strategy has involved the closure of some special schools and the transfer of resources to mainstream schools.

The ways in which the Council consults schools in its planning and decision-making have improved considerably over the last five years but we want to continue to improve how we involve schools as key stakeholders in our plans for pupils with special educational needs (SEN).

**PLEASE TAKE A COUPLE OF MINUTES TO COMPLETE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE AND EMAIL IT BACK TO SEN.Team@liverpool.gov.uk or send through internal mail to Yvonne Owens c/o the SEN & Disability Team. Responses by Friday 7th April 2006**

**No responses will be attributed to any individual or specific school. However, to enable us to categorise the responses, could you please indicate the category of your school (delete or tick as appropriate).**

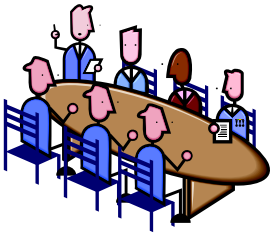
**Primary** **Secondary** **Special**

1. **Do you understand and recognise the position adopted by the Council in relation to the Inclusion agenda and the Government's Removing Barriers to Achievement Policy Statement? (delete or tick as appropriate).**

   **Yes** **No**

2. **How has this affected your school? e.g. has the inclusion of pupils with SEN caused any particular problems, has it raised any staff training issues? etc. (please be as specific as possible)**

**Thank you for your co-operation**



Pupil Advocacy Service
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The City of Liverpool

**LIVERPOOL'S INCLUSION STRATEGY**

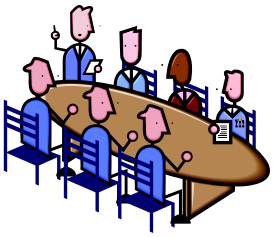
**Questions for School Councils**

Dear School Council,

Liverpool City Council would like to hear your views on their plans to make sure that all children can go to their local school. Please could you tell us your views by filling out this questionnaire in your next meeting?

| |
|---|
| Question 1<br>Do you think that all children with special educational needs/disability should go to their local school instead of a special school? |
| Question 2<br>What should Liverpool City Council do to make sure that children with special educational needs/disability have the same opportunities at school as other children? |

**Thank you for your valuable ideas.**



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**LIVERPOOL'S INCLUSION STRATEGY**

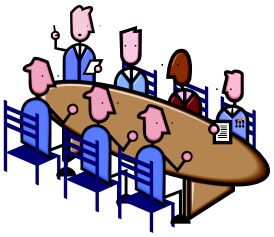
**Questions for Youth Council**

Dear Youth Council,

Liverpool City Council would like to hear your views on their plans to make sure that all children and young people can go to their local school. Please could you tell us your views by filling out this questionnaire in your next meeting?

| |
|---|
| Question 1<br>Do you think that all children with special educational needs/disability should go to their local school instead of a special school? |
| Question 2<br>What should Liverpool City Council do to make sure that children with special educational needs/disability have the same opportunities at school as other children? |

**Thank you for your valuable ideas.**



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**LIVERPOOL'S INCLUSION STRATEGY**

**Questions for Schools' Parliament**

Dear School Parliament,

Liverpool City Council would like to hear your views on their plans to make sure that all children can go to their local school. Please could you tell us your views by filling out this questionnaire in your next meeting?

| |
|---|
| Question 1<br>Do you think that all children with special educational needs/disability should go to their local school instead of a special school? |
| Question 2<br>What should Liverpool City Council do to make sure that children with special educational needs/disability have the same opportunities at school as other children? |

**Thank you for your valuable ideas.**

## LIVERPOOL'S INCLUSION STRATEGY

Liverpool City Council's Policy on SEN and Inclusion was launched in 2000. One of the main features of this strategy has involved the closure of some special schools and the transfer of resources to mainstream schools.

Karen Gleave, Greater Merseyside Regional SEN Facilitator, is researching for her Master's Degree, how the Council involves parents, pupils and schools in its Inclusion policy. She would welcome the opportunity to gain your views on this subject as part of her research.

The ways in which the Council consults parents/carers and children/young people in its planning and decision-making has improved considerably over the last five years. The Council is working with the Parent Partnership Service, SEN Forum, Pupil Advocacy Service and the Liverpool Parent and Carer Forum to try to make sure that everyone is involved in the Council's plans for pupils with SEN/disabilities.

**Do you feel that the Council is listening? Do you feel that you have the chance to influence Liverpool's plans for Inclusion?**

**We would be very interested to hear your views and to learn how we can involve parents/carers/children and young people more in the decisions affecting their lives.**

**This event will take place on 8th March 9.30 a.m. – 2.30 p.m. at GLAXO Centre, Norton Street, Liverpool off London Road**

For further information and to book a place contact June Hill on 233 2948



**Liverpool's Inclusion Strategy**
**Wednesday, 8th March, 2006 at GLAXO Centre**

**Questions for groups**

1. **What do you understand by the term Inclusion?**

2. **Do you feel you have any influence over Liverpool's Inclusion Strategy?**

3. **What issues would you like the Council to think about when they are transferring resources and pupils from special to mainstream schools?**

**Please feel free to be as open and honest as you wish as no comments will be attributed to any individual.**